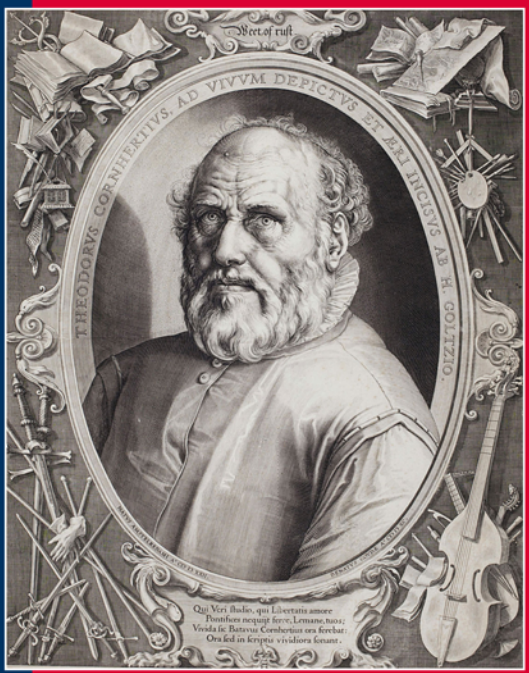
STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND REFORMATION TRADITIONS

Disputation by Decree

The Public Disputations between Reformed Ministers and Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert as Instruments of Religious Policy during the Dutch Revolt (1577-1583)


Wert of ruft
THEODORVS CORNHERTIVS, AD VIVVM DEPICTVS ET AERI INCISVS AB H. GOLTZIO
Qui Veri ftudio, qui Libertatis amore
Pontifices nequit ferre, Lemane, tuos:
Vivida fic Batavus Cornhertius ora ferebat:
Ora fed in feriptis vividiora ferunt.

Marianne Roobol

SERIES EDITOR

Andrew Colin Gow

BRILL

Disputation by Decree

Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions

Edited by

Andrew Colin Gow
Edmonton, Alberta

In cooperation with

Sylvia Brown, Edmonton, Alberta
Falk Eisermann, Berlin
Berndt Hamm, Erlangen
Johannes Heil, Heidelberg
Susan C. Karant-Nunn, Tucson, Arizona
Martin Kaufhold, Augsburg
Jürgen Miethke, Heidelberg
M.E.H. Nicolette Mout, Leiden
Christopher Ocker, San Anselmo and Berkeley, California

Founding Editor

Heiko A. Oberman †

VOLUME 152

Disputation by Decree

The Public Disputations between Reformed Ministers and Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert as Instruments of Religious Policy during the Dutch Revolt (1577–1583)

By
Marianne Roobol

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2010

On the cover: Portrait of D.V. Coornhert by Hendrick Goltzius (1592). By kind permission of the Prentenkabinet, University of Leiden.

The publication of this book was made possible by a grant of the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO). NWO Dossier no. P24-1100.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Roobol, Marianne.
Disputation by decree : the public disputations between reformed ministers and Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert as instruments of religious policy during the Dutch Revolt (1577–1583) / by Marianne Roobol.
p. cm. — (Studies in medieval and reformation traditions, ISSN 1573-4188 ; v. 152)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-18661-3 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. Netherlands—History—Wars of Independence, 1556–1648—Religious aspects. 2. Coornhert, D. V. (Dirk Volkertszoon), 1522–1590. 3. Donteclock, Reginaldus, ca. 1545–ca. 1611? 4. Saravia, Adrien, 1530–1612. 5. Reformation—Netherlands. 6. Reformed Church—Doctrines—History—16th century. 7. Netherlands—Church history—16th century. 8. Religious tolerance—Netherlands—History—16th century. 9. Gereformeerde Kerk in de Nederlanden—Doctrines—History—16th century. I. Cornelisz, Arent, 1547–1605 II. Title. III. Series.

DH186.5.R65 2010
949.2'03—dc22

2010030517

ISSN 1573-4188
ISBN 978 90 04 18661 3

Copyright 2010 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Hotei Publishing, IDC Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA.
Fees are subject to change.

The history of ideas is no less an infinite collection of unpredictable accidents than is political history.

Leszek Kolakowski, *God owes us nothing. A brief remark on Pascal's religion and on the spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago, 1995), 31.

To my parents

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements xi
Abbreviations xiii

Disputation by Decree: An Introduction 1

Chapter One Wartime Polemics: On the Public Church 13
Letters and Pamphlets 13
Troubled Times 20
A Public Church 26
Scepticism 33

Chapter Two Room for Debate: A Question of Tolerance? ... 43
The Cult of Coornhert 43
The Problem of Liberty 55
Reformation and Disputation 61

Chapter Three The Coornhert Affair (I):
From Correspondence to Disputation 75
Thomas Tilius 75
Pestilens ille homo 86
Paper Controversy 95
Debate in Delft 109
Leiden Academy and Beyond 113

Chapter Four Pro et Contra: The Leiden Disputation (1578) 123
Along the Rapenburg 123
Fury 125
Disorder 136
Settling Accounts 144
Exit 151

Chapter Five The Coornhert Affair (II): From Pamphlet to
Disputation 155
Adrianus Saravia 155
Narrow Margins 163
Proeve 176

Resolution, Remonstrance and Request 187
Lobbying a Reluctant States 201

Chapter Six Bridging the Divide: The Disputation in the Hague (1583) 215
In the Binnenhof 215
Conditions 220
Pertinentia 226
Multiplication 239
Persuasiveness 247
An Open Ending 274

In conclusion: Authority and Order 281

Bibliography 293
Index of Names 307

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book bears the imprint of countless conversations, scholarly meetings and library visits. I have many people to thank for helping me along the way, though I can only mention a small number of them here.

My most special thanks go out to my parents who have provided support in every possible way over the years of writing this PhD-thesis.

I would also like to say thank you to my dear sister Melanie and long-time friend Tabitta van Nouhuys, who both proved most supportive *paranimfen* on that very icy day in March 2005. Likewise, Hans Cools and Louis Sicking have been steadfast in their support of this book and its author. A big thank you to them too.

I have fond memories of countless Friday afternoon meetings of the Contactgroep Zestiende Eeuw in Leiden. I would like to thank Prof. Juliaan Woltjer and all other participants for generously sharing their expertise and enthusiasm.

In preparing this book I spent many research hours in the pleasant surroundings of the Dousakamer (Leiden University Library) and the reading room of the Delft municipal archive. I would like to say thank you to all staff for their kind advice and good-humoured assistance.

Paul Arblaster has provided a most sensitive translation of the original Dutch manuscript. I thank him for his close reading of the text.

Lastly, I would like to express my indebtedness to Nicolette Mout and Henk van Nierop. Their love of sixteenth century history and extensive knowledge of the world as it was then have been a great source of inspiration.

ABBREVIATIONS

Archives/Libraries

GAD	Gemeentearchief Delft
GAL	Gemeentearchief Leiden
KHA	Koninklijk Huisarchief
NA	National Archives
UBA	Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam
UBL	Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden

Others

BMGN	*Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*
BMHG	*Bijdragen en mededelingen van het historisch genootschap*
BWPGN	J. P. de Bie en J. Loosjes ed., *Biografisch woordenboek van protestantsche godgeleerden in Nederland* (5 vols.; The Hague [1919]–1943)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CHLMP	Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg ed., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy* (Cambridge 1982)
CHRP	Charles B. Schmitt ed., *The Cambridge history of Renaissance philosophy* (Cambridge 1988)
CR	Corpus Reformatorum
Lexicon	Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme (5 dln.; Kampen 1978–2001)
NAKG	*Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis*
NNBW	P. C. Molhuysen en P. J. Blok ed., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* (10 vols.; Leiden 1911–1937)
NTT	*Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift*
OER	H. Hillerbrand ed., *The Oxford encyclopedia of the Reformation* (4 vols.; Oxford 1996)
RGP	Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën

Van der Aa	A. J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden, bevattende levensbeschrijvingen etc.* Voortgezet door K. J. K. van Harderwijk en G. D. J. Schotel (21 vols.; Haarlem 1852–1878)
Wercken	*Dieryck Volckertsz. Coornherts Wercken. Waer van eenige noyt voor desen gedruct zyn* (3 vols.; Amsterdam 1633)
WMV	Werken der Marnix Vereeniging

DISPUTATION BY DECREE: AN INTRODUCTION

In the turbulent period of the Dutch Revolt the States of Holland regularly appointed ad hoc committees to draft or implement policy decisions. This had been customary even before 1572, but the uncertain years following on the First Free Assembly of the States (held in Dordrecht, July 1572) gave new stimulus to the committee system. Decision-making in the plenary assembly of the States was often difficult. Ad hoc committees could be called into being at short notice, increasing the flexibility and effectiveness of the States. They could improvise, as the terms of reference provided to the commissioners could easily be adapted to the needs of the moment. [1] Central to the present study are two unusual ad hoc committees that have not previously been recognized as such. They were instituted to manage two remarkable religious disputations between the man of letters Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert (1522–1590) and a number of notable Reformed clergymen: Arent Cornelisz (1547–1605), [2] Reginaldus Donteclock (ca. 1545-after 1611), and Adrianus Saravia (ca. 1532–1613). These public debates took place in Leiden, on 14 and 15 April 1578, and in The Hague, from 27 October to 3 November and from 28 November to 1 December 1583.

In one important respect, these committees charged with organising religious disputations were unlike other ad hoc committees of the States. They were concerned with religious affairs, while the general run of committees focused on matters of military, fiscal and administrative concern.[3] It was a thing previously unheard of that the States should not only intervene directly in theological controversies but appoint an ad hoc committee to do so. The institution of the public disputations in Leiden and The Hague shows the political significance that theological debate had in this period. Although Coornhert and his

---

[1] J. W. Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland en de Opstand: De ontwikkeling van hun functies en organisatie in de periode 1544–1588* (The Hague, 1990), 91–93, 199.

[2] His family name is Storm van 's-Gravenzande. Cornelisz was also known as Crusius.

[3] Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland*, 199–200.

contemporaries firmly distinguished between a 'political' and an 'ecclesial' sphere, they had no notion of the modern separation of church and state. In concerns for the unity of the country, political and religious affairs were inextricably linked. The government served the common good by advancing the preaching of the true Christian faith.

The religious policy of the States has been little studied. In his overview of the development of this organ of government during the Revolt, J. W. Koopmans gives a number of examples of the work of the States at a religious level. The questions concerned were primarily of a practical nature, such as the division of church buildings and the payment of clergymen. The States were also responsible for "maintaining oversight and functioning as supreme judge in disagreements." [4] He makes no mention of the intervention of the States in religious controversies involving critics who were not members of the public church, such as the Coornhert affair.

Because Reformed ministers were critical in their letters of the lack of support they were getting from the authorities, an unrosy picture has developed of the relationship between church and state in the early period of the Revolt. In 1579 the Amsterdam *predikant* Johannes Kuchlinus (1545–1606) lamented that the government took no action against a monster like Coornhert.[5] His fellow minister Thomas Tilius (ca. 1534–1590) wrote in 1582, "So far as church discipline is concerned, the States will draw no advantage from it." [6] Should the general conclusion therefore be that the government gave the public church little support beyond the financial?

The historian Andrew Pettegree has rejected any such interpretation of the clergy's letters of complaint as superficial. Their dark reflections should not be taken too literally. The mutual ties between church and state deserve more attention. [7] These ties were linked to the political

---

[4] Ibidem, 159–163.

[5] "Mi domine frater, quam care haec monstra a magistratu superiori tolerantur." Kuchlinus to Cornelisz, 11 October 1579, in *Brieven uit onderscheidene kerkelijke archieven*, ed. J. J. van Toorenenbergen, WMV, ser. 3, part 5 (Utrecht, 1885), 241.

[6] Tilius to Cornelisz, 17 July 1582, in A. A. van Schelven ed., "Briefwisseling van Thomas Tilius," *BMHG* 55 (1934), 119–175, esp. 164. The negotiations between ministers and regents concerning church order were indeed difficult: Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, 2002), 192–195.

[7] Andrew Pettegree, "Coming to Terms with Victory: The Upbuilding of a Calvinist Church in Holland, 1572–1590," in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* , ed. Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge, 1994), 160–180, esp. 180.

and religious developments that are now grouped under the name Dutch Revolt.

The radicalization of the Revolt against Philip II after April 1572, when the Sea Beggars seized Den Briel, drove rebels and Reformed preachers closer together. The anti-Catholic sentiments of the latter made them the loyal guardians of the revolt against a king who presented himself as the divinely appointed defender of Roman Catholic hegemony. From 1567 onwards, tightly organized ministers in exile had shown their reliability in supporting both the funds and the morale of William of Orange's struggle. Their power base in Holland was, however, as yet very small; the vast majority of the population—including many who had some degree of sympathy for Protestant ideas—still regarded itself as Catholic and was in no hurry to change its religious allegiance. After 1572 the minority position of the Reformed Church was hard to reconcile with the need to mobilize broad support for the Revolt. The policy of freedom of religion decided on by Orange and the States at their first official gathering in Dordrecht, foundered on the prohibition of Catholic worship in Holland issued in 1573. Now that religious unity had been fractured, the question arose of how social cohesion could nevertheless be maintained in time of war. And particularly: what part should the Reformed Church play?

As long as historians concentrate on a few private remarks by the clergy concerning the lack of decisive action by the States, for instance relating to the introduction of ecclesiastical disciplinary regulations (*corpus disciplinae*), the ultimate meaning and purpose of the Reformed Church as public church remains elusive. This status of being the official church, supported by the government, transcended any organizational issues. The present study will cast light on the religious policy of the States, based as it was on a special relationship between government and church. It was the public *legitimization* of the Reformed Church as the general, public church—a goal with both political and theological significance—that was at stake in the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague.

The disputations in Leiden and The Hague were spectacular affairs. The debates took place in public spaces and attracted a large audience. The public must, on both occasions, have looked forward eagerly to a debate in which the feared polemicist Coornhert would make an appearance. He was known for his sharp tongue and his vicious pen. His criticism was unsettling for the ministers of the Reformed Church,

who constantly had to reflect upon a fitting response. According to some of them, there was no point in arguing against the deluge of specious arguments that Coornhert poured out. Nevertheless, the minister Werner Helmichius (1551–1608) had to admit in 1584 that Coornhert's lengthy speeches had adversely affected the people's judgement in religious affairs.[8]

Little data is available concerning the reception of Coornhert's countless publications. We know neither the print runs, nor the size and nature of the readership. The extent of the concerns of the Reformed clergy with regard to Coornhert's behaviour justifies the general conclusion that his writings had wide resonance. Here, however, a circular argument lurks: Coornhert's influence is demonstrated by, and explains, the concerns of the ministers. The religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague do show that the conflict between Coornhert and the clergy was also of interest to others. The States of Holland watched the development of the struggle closely. Their attempts to settle the difference of opinion were not regarded as unusual or unjust by either party.

A quick glance at Coornhert's oeuvre, collected after his death in three hefty folio volumes, makes it clear that he was a remarkable writer in a number of ways. [9] There were few who dared proclaim *on paper* views that went against the policies of the States. Coornhert not only did this, but did so with regard to issues touching the foundations of the political-religious establishment. Was the Reformed Church the true church? Could it advance the common welfare? Formal aspects of his work also provide clues to Coornhert's impact as a polemicist. He wrote in the vernacular, something that was still uncommon in his time when touching on learned topics. [10] Coornhert also deployed

---

[8] "Et suis sophismatibus etiam optima et solidissima vestra scripta rhetoricando eludet, iudiciaque plebeiorum, qui lectionis et argumentorum prolixitate ac multitudine facile obruuntur ac confunduntur, hoc modo facilius intricabit et suspendet." Helmichius to Cornelisz, 26 March 1584, in *Brieven uit onderscheidene kerkelijke archieven*, ed. H. Q. Janssen and J. J. van Toorenenbergen, WMV, ser. 3, part 4 (Utrecht, 1880).

[9] D. V. Coornhert, *Wercken, waer van eenige noyt voor desen gedruct zyn* (Amsterdam, 1633).

[10] Coornhert thus provided an interesting contribution to "one of early modern Europe's most vibrant public realms." Peter Arnade posits that the vernacular political culture emerging in this period constitutes the Revolt's "most novel feature". Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots. The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (New York/ London, 2008), ix.

a style of argumentation that combined clear reasoning with rhetorical force. He addressed his public directly, took his readers by the hand, and explained the issues at stake in a way that made them clear for the less well educated. His *potential* readership was certainly large.

The young ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock, who stood against Coornhert in the Leiden disputation, were well-known figures.[11] Cornelisz in particular played an important part in building up the Reformed ecclesial organization, earning him the nickname 'the Pope of Delft'.[12] In 1581 he took a key position as the president of the synod of Middelburg.[13] At the religious disputation in The Hague, the duo from Delft gave way to the renowned theologian Saravia. In 1582, at the invitation of the Prince of Orange, he had accepted a lectureship at the University of Leiden, but remained an outsider among the Reformed clergy of Holland.

The involvement in the disputation in The Hague of a variety of servants of power—representatives of the States, civic regents, and members of the Provincial Court of Holland and the Supreme Court—deprived the gathering of any hint of informality. The debate in Leiden was also chaired by leading jurists, who had earned their spurs in national administration. There was no way of misunderstanding that these religious disputations were indeed affairs of state.

The States of Holland naturally linked the religious disputations to their desire to serve God's honour, but they expressly added that the purpose of the debates was to safeguard peace and order, advance religious unity, and confirm the authority of the government.[14] The ministers also thought to serve the common good (the "commonwealth" as they put it) by their performance in Leiden and The Hague. In 1583 they wished to defend their doctrine before "the whole world", as government inaction threatened to let slide the advances that the true faith had made, advances sealed by the blood of martyrs during

---

[11] *NNBW* IV, 480–484; *BWPGN* V, 264–270; *Lexicon* IV, 104–107 (Cornelisz); *NNBW* VIII, 412–414; *BWPGN* II, 537–547; *Lexicon* II, 173–176 (Donteclock).

[12] A. Ph. F. Wouters, *Nieuw en ongezien: Kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland, 1572–1621*, vol. 1, *De nieuwe kerk* (Delft, 1994), 17.

[13] R. H. Bremmer, "De nationale synode van Middelburg (1581): politieke achtergronden van kerkelijke besluitvorming," in *De nationale synode te Middelburg* , ed. J. P. van Dooren (Middelburg, 1981), 1–55.

[14] Commission for the religious disputation in The Hague, NA, Staten van Holland (StvH), inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

the Revolt.[15] Coornhert, in a letter written in 1583 to Nicolaas van der Laan (ca. 1520–1584), a representative of the city of Haarlem in the assembly of the States, used the word *landtsake* (affair of state). He had recently voiced fierce criticism of the Heidelberg Catechism, which had come to take an important part in Reformed religious life. Coornhert regarded the debate about this Catechism as touching on the commonweal, for the "eternal salvation or doom of many thousand souls" was at issue. [16]

In Holland, the disputations in Leiden and The Hague were the only events of their kind. Early historians of the Dutch Revolt, such as Pieter Cornelisz. Bor (1559–1635), Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft (1581–1647) and Geeraert Brandt (1626–1685), already mentioned these remarkable gatherings.[17] While at first sight exceptional, the debates seem less unique when seen in a comparative European perspective. Religious disputations and colloquys took place throughout Europe, from Poland to Poissy. They were rooted in the tradition of academic disputation, but exchanged the academic forum for the political. During the Reformation period, debates of this type became surprisingly common. In a world of religious discord and division, such gatherings held out the promise of a strictly ordered exchange of views that could provide a solution to religious controversies. The outcome of the discussions was often fixed beforehand, and the religious disputation simply provided a cloak of legitimacy for a change in religious policy. There were, however, also debates in which the parties sought a mutually acceptable settlement, so that a territory's religious peace could be restored.[18]

Whoever presided over the debate could choose the specific formal structure of the exchanges, a choice that could be decisive for the debate's outcome. In the disputations in Leiden and The Hague, the

---

[15] Petition of Cornelisz, Donteclock and Saravia to the States of Holland, August 1583, GAD, Archief van de Hervormde Gemeente te Delft (Hervormde Gem.) inv. no. 636.

[16] Coornhert to Nicolaas van der Laan, 4 January 1583, in D. V. Coornhert, *Disputatie over den Catechismus van Heydelbergh, openbaerlyck voor den volck ghehouden op't Hof van 's Graven-haghe in Hollandt, anno 1583* (Gouda, 1617), 11.

[17] Pieter Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen, beroerten, ende borgerlijcke oneenicheyden*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1621), bk. 13, 82r–83r; bk. 18, 35v–36v; P. C. Hooft, *Nederlandsche historien* (3rd edition; Amsterdam 1677) 885; G. Brandt, *Historie der reformatie en andere kerkelijke geschiedenissen, in en ontrent de Nederlanden* (2nd edition; Amsterdam, 1677) I, 693–697.

[18] See pp. 66–70.

commissioners of the States of Holland held this directing position. Their actions accorded with the aim of the States to restore religious unity under the aegis of a strong, authoritative public church. As freedom of conscience remained untouched in Holland, it was possible—privately, at least—to hold beliefs contrary to those promoted by the authorities. There was, however, nothing like a 'multiconfessional' society. The Reformed Church did not dominate as first among equals, but claimed to be the catholic (in the sense of universal) church of God. It was protected as such by the States. It is against this background that we will examine the significance of the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague, devoting one chapter to the background and one to the course of each of them.

The controversy between Coornhert and the Reformed clergy sprang from modest beginnings early in 1577, with a letter (almost unremarked since) from Coornhert to Thomas Tilius.[19] This three-page missive set off an extensive polemic concerning the nature of the true church, finally issuing in the religious disputation in Leiden. After this debate, Coornhert and the ministers continued their paper war. In 1582 Coornhert again caused uproar with his writing, this time a printed treatise in which he rejected the Heidelberg Catechism as unscriptural.[20] This pamphlet was the basis for discussions during the disputation in The Hague.

Those writing about Coornhert have asked themselves few questions about how the disputations in Leiden and The Hague came about. The debates are taken as a given. Their work almost seems to imply that these debates were in some way the unavoidable outcome of Coornhert's decision to vent his critique of the public church.[21] There is, further, agreement that these debates should be regarded as a visible expression of Coornhert's much praised desire for tolerance, as opposed to the supposedly repressive approach favoured by the

---

[19] D. V. Coornhert, *Redene mijnder woorden houdende, dat die roomsche kercke beter sij dan der gereformeerden*. UBA, Collectie Mennonitica, Ms XXVII A 2312.

[20] D. V. Coornhert, *Proeve vande Nederlantsche catechismo, omme te verstaen of die voort gecomen is wte godlijcke schrift, dan wt het menschelijcke vernuft* ([Haarlem], 1582).

[21] Henk Bonger, *Life and Work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*, tr. and ed. Gerrit Voogt (Amsterdam and New York, 2004), 69–100; Gerrit Voogt, *Constraint on Trial: Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert and Religious Freedom* (Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 52; Kirksville 2000) 178–197.

Reformed Church.[22] The essentially 'tolerant' nature of the debates is held to explain why a dissident figure such as Coornhert was nevertheless given the opportunity to make public declarations about matters of faith in Leiden and The Hague. The second chapter of the present work will provide a historiographical analysis, indicating and explaining the shortcomings of this view. This study will present an alternative interpretation of the disputations under scrutiny, in line with the findings of a number of German historians regarding comparable disputations elsewhere. Central to the disputations in Leiden and The Hague was not the Coornhertian ideal of tolerance, but the more prosaic interests of the States of Holland and of the public church.

The States and the ministers jointly planned the debates in Leiden and in The Hague, but their plans were not always easy to put into practice. It was only with difficulty that Coornhert could be got to agree to the format of the debates. There was no prescripted way of organizing a formal public debate, and all sorts of variants were imaginable. The formulation of the subjects for debate (the *status quaestionis*) and the division of roles between the parties, both decisions to be taken before the debate could begin, were of decisive importance to the outcome. Accordingly, neither party showed any inclination to make concessions in the preliminary discussions.

The cautious position of the States was also a complicating factor in the run-up to the debates. The government had principled reservations towards religious disputation. This guardedness was due to fear; the States regarded religious controversy as a threat to public order. As the controversy with Coornhert escalated, however, the view gained ground that there might be more to gain than to lose in having the issues thrashed out in public. The States wanted to bring closure to the conflict between Coornhert and the ministers. A region at war did not have the luxury of allowing internal disquiet. Chapters three and five illuminate the difficulties lying behind the launch of the debates in Leiden and The Hague, respectively.

To clarify just what it meant for the disputations in Leiden and The Hague to be run by ad hoc committees of the States, we will have to examine not only the preliminaries to the debates, but also, and in detail, the course of the debates themselves. The strictly theologi-

[22] See p. 49.

cal topics dealt with in the debates at first sight make the minutes of the religious disputations less suitable research material for a regular historian. This might explain the relative lack of historical interest in these disputations. Moreover, a multidisciplinary approach now dominates in the field of church history, so that church historians and theologians on their part also seem less inclined to contribute to the history of religious doctrine. Cultural-historical research into religious life in the widest sense is now in vogue.[23] The hair-splitting of sixteenth-century theologians is out of fashion in every sense.

It is, however, doubtful that an analysis of the discussions in Leiden and The Hague would benefit from an exclusively historical-dogmatic approach, which in these cases would have to focus on exegetical questions. While the biblical basis of the participants' arguments does have to be examined, too one-sided a concentration on questions of biblical hermeneutics would draw attention away from the *purpose* of the debates. Both Coornhert and the ministers were speaking to one another for the benefit of a broader public audience, in the first instance those actually listening to the disputations, and at one remove the later readers of the protocols of their exchanges, which were expected to circulate widely in print. A speech was all the more authoritative when it was demonstrably based on a multitude of biblical passages. Persuasiveness, however, relied on more than this, namely on rhetorical ability. The public had to be swept away by the speaker's words. According to Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (4:150) this required solid arguments, but in themselves they were not enough. He indicated that speakers also had to bring about an *emotional* change to "move and sway" their hearers. [24]

The primary goal of both Coornhert and the ministers in Leiden and The Hague was to position themselves as representatives of true belief, and consequently as protectors of the common good. To gain the audience's approval, they deployed not only *ad hominem* attacks, but every weapon in their rhetorical armoury. Coornhert's

---

[23] Wim Janse, "De protestantse reformatie in de Nederlanden: Wendingen in de twintigste-eeuwse historiografie," in *Balans van een eeuw: Wendingen in de historiografie van het christendom 1901–2001*, ed. Jack de Mooij and Ineke Smit (Heerenveen, 2002), 33–49, esp. 38–44; Joris van Eijnatten and Fred van Lieburg, "Introduction," in Willem Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief: Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History*, Studies in Dutch Religious History 1 (Hilversum, 2002), 11–16, esp. 15.

[24] Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Oxford World's Classics, tr. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1997), 142.

fierce accusations worked upon the feelings of his listeners, and Saravia's strategy of conciliation was effective largely because of the mollifying effect of his words. Furthermore, the speakers deliberately concentrated on theological questions that played an important part in the religious life of the multitude. Their rhetorical strategies should, then, not be seen as artificial, as though they wished to beautify, or even camouflage, their theological arguments. On the contrary, form and content were a seamless whole. The logical validity of the speakers' arguments also contributed to the desired rhetorical effect: making the hearers more receptive to the doctrines being presented.

To do justice to the political character of almost all sixteenth-century theological debates, the theologian Alister McGrath distinguishes a "secondary hermeneutic" in religious disputations.[25] Theologians were no less guided by the principle of *sola scriptura* even though the course of theological debates was dictated by political circumstances.[26] McGrath points to the earliest religious disputations in Zürich (1523), in which the city government in effect decided which interpretation of the Bible was correct.[27] The States of Holland considered themselves unqualified to make any such determination. Despite this reticence on their part, their involvement in fixing the *order* of the debates in Leiden and The Hague had no less influence on their outcome, as will be seen in chapters four and six.

Finally, the use of the term 'disputation' has to be considered. It is a contemporary term, used to denote many types of formal debate. Dutch source texts for the late sixteenth-century refer to *disputatie, colloquium*, '*tsamenspreeckinge* and, rather more elusively, to *besprec*. At the time, these terms were used pretty much interchangeably, but today's historians distinguish a variety of meanings.[28] The original

---

[25] Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford, 1987), 172–173.

[26] For an overview of the religious disputations held in Europe in the Reformation period (including and extensive bibliography), see Irene Dingel, "Religionsgespräche IV," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 28, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin and New York, 1997), 654–681; a brief introduction can be found in Bernd Moeller, "Disputations" in *OER* I, 487–490.

[27] McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins*, 172–173.

[28] The semantic distinctions and typologies of such terms as 'colloquy' and 'disputation' are far more developed in the German historical literature than in either English or Dutch; they are set out clearly in Thomas Fuchs, *Konfession und Gespräch: Typologie und Funktion der Religionsgespräche in der Reformationszeit*, Norm und

Dutch version of this work used *godsdienstgesprek* as an umbrella term for all such exchanges, following the historian Marion Hollerbach's preference for *Religionsgespräche*.[29] The English translation settles for 'disputation', the term already being well entrenched in Coornhert studies. From 'disputation' it is only a small step to Bernd Moeller's 'political disputation'.[30] The debate in Leiden fits Moeller's definition of a 'political disputation' in every respect. This is far less evident for the disputation in The Hague, however, as it shifted from being a 'political disputation' in Moeller's sense to being a debate in which the Reformed minister Saravia sought to conciliate Coornhert. Nevertheless, the term 'disputation' has been maintained here, in line with contemporary sources.

The term 'Catholic' can also be confusing. When speaking of the Catholic Church, Coornhert and the ministers used the terms 'Roman' (*roomsch*), but this has been set aside as pejorative. In the present work, when the term 'catholic' is used in the sense of 'universal' (a designation that both sides claimed for their views) it will be with a lower case initial. Because the terms 'Calvinist' and 'Calvinism' are subject to ambiguity, they will be avoided here.[31] The term 'Reformed' is to be preferred, as referring to a church and a doctrine that even at the time identified itself as such.

Struktur: Studien zum sozialen Wandel in Mittelalter und frühen Neuzeit 4 (Cologne, 1995), 6–16.

[29] Marion Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch als Mittel der konfessionellen und politischen Auseinandersetzung im Deutschland des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Europäischen Hochschulschriften, Reihe 3, 65 (Frankfurt on Main, 1982), 6–7.

[30] Bernd Moeller, "Zu den städtischen Disputationen der frühen Reformation," in *Festschrift für Martin Heckel zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Karl-Hermann Kästner and Knut Wolfgang Nörr (Tübingen, 1999), 179–195, esp. 179.

[31] Some historians reserve these terms for the (doctrine of) ministers who sought a small, militant Reformed Church ('narrow church'), with no desire to be a popular church ('broad church').

CHAPTER ONE

WARTIME POLEMICS: ON THE PUBLIC CHURCH

Letters and Pamphlets

The partisan nature of the letters and pamphlets on which this study is based will be immediately apparent. The hostility between Coornhert and the Reformed ministers not only determined the tone of these texts, it was the prime reason for them being written at all. Despite this, it is possible to arrive at a balanced interpretation of the disputations in Leiden and The Hague. This rests on a careful rendering of the positions of both Coornhert and the ministers, supplemented with archival research in official repositories. Since the States of Holland played a decisive role in bringing the debates about, the letters and pamphlets in question always have to be studied against a background of official policy decisions.

The extensive correspondence of leading clergymen such as Tilius, Cornelisz and Hendrik van der Corput (1536–1601) enable us to relate the Coornhert affair to the difficulties confronting the building up of a Reformed Church in Holland.[1] Not until 1582 did the ministers avail themselves of the printed word in their struggle with Coornhert. It was in that year that the Leiden theologian Lambertus Danaeus (ca. 1530–1595) began to circulate a pamphlet containing sharp criticism of one of Coornhert's letters. Copies of this letter, addressed to an anonymous correspondent, must have been circulating for some time.[2] The distinction between printed works and those circulating in manuscript (whether autograph or scribally copied) should not be seen as a distinction between writings meant for public and for public reading. Handwritten treatises, and letters in particular, were often made available to numerous readers. From 1577 to 1582 the polemics between Coornhert and the clergymen comprised an exchange of manuscripts,

---

[1] The correspondence of Tilius, for instance, provides information about the course of the writer's life, the Coornhert affair, the involvement of the House of Orange, and the development of the Reformation in the Netherlands. Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling," 119–120.

[2] See p. 170.

but this controversy nonetheless transcended the little circle of active polemicists, and even threatened to endanger public order. Oral transmission, coupled with gossip and detraction, was also very important. The ministers battled Coornhert from the pulpit, which only served to inflame the buzz on the street.

Although Coornhert was far from remaining silent in this oral battle, he had no pulpit from which to denounce his opponents. Furthermore, after 1567 he was repeatedly in exile, so that he was at some remove from his audience. He was left with only the printing press as a medium to warn the faithful of Holland against the Reformed Church, and took recourse to the pamphlet, a genre that excellently suited this man whom one commentator described as "born to contradiction."[3] Pamphlets, by definition, served as weapons in the fight to prove one's point.[4] In 1572 Coornhert's first, flaming denunciation of the Reformed Church in Holland appeared in print. Coornhert, however, had long been known to be hostile to the Reformed faith. No one less than Calvin himself had taken exception to one of his works, and that as early as 1562.[5]

Two pamphlets in particular are important for the reconstruction of the disputations in Leiden and The Hague: *Vande Leydtsche disputatie warachtigh verhael* (1583; A Truthful Account of the Leiden Disputation) and *Disputatie over den Catechismus van Heydelbergh* (1617; Disputation about the Heidelberg Catechism).[6] They are the only record of the course of the discussions. The fact that the provenance of the minutes for the encounters in Leiden and The Hague runs solely through Coornhert does nothing to improve the confidence with which they can be relied upon. The pamphlets in which the minutes

---

[3] "Ad contradicendum natus." Arend van Buchell, *Diarium*, ed. G. Brom and L. A. Langeraad (Amsterdam, 1907), cited in W. Bergsma, " 'I shall honestly confess to you the truth': A Learned Frisian Speaks His Mind about Coornhert," *Lias* 22 (1995), 19–27.

[4] P. A. M. Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand in de pamfletten, 1566–1584* (Utrecht, 1978); Matthijs van Otegem, "Tijd, snelheid, afstand: de mechanica van het pamflet," *De zeventiende eeuw* 17 (2001), 50–51.

[5] On this polemic, see Mirjam van Veen , *"Verschooninghe van de roomsche afgoderye": De polemiek van Calvijn met nicodemieten, in het bijzonder met Coornhert* , Bibliotheca humanistica & reformatorica 60 ('t Goy-Houten, 2001).

[6] D. V. Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie warachtigh verhael* ([Haarlem] 1583); D. V. Coornhert, *Disputatie over den Catechismus van Heydelbergh, openbaerlyck voor den volck ghehouden op't Hof van 's Graven-haghe in Hollandt, anno 1583* (Gouda, 1617).

appear convey only one party's perspective of the debates. Coornhert regarded the disputations as the precursors of a coming policy of persecution. By publishing these treatises, the second printed only after the author's death, Coornhert and his later supporters aimed to give weight to this view. To what extent can a reliable historical reconstruction of the disputations be possible when these are the main sources?

We have good reason to believe that Coornhert incorporated the minutes of the discussions into his pamphlets unaltered. He expressly indicates that the notaries present at the discussions notarized the *acta*. Each day they signed off on the documents after the end of that day's exchanges. It is unlikely that Coornhert—who as notary public had taken the minutes of a religious disputation in Haarlem in 1566, and had worked as a notary on other occasions since—would have tampered with such records. [7] Furthermore, there were several copies of the protocols in circulation, so any sharp practice on his part would not have passed unnoticed, and any animadversion arising from such a discovery would seriously have damaged his credibility. Coornhert in fact went to some lengths to avoid accusations of this type, by very clearly differentiating the official record of the debate from his discussion of it in the way his pamphlets were laid out.

The pamphlets show a methodical approach. Coornhert first circulated the minutes of the Leiden disputation in manuscript. In this format it was easy for the reader to distinguish between the minutes and Coornhert's comments, which were inserted on loose sheets between the pages.[8] In print the difference is still visible. Coornhert uses glosses and indicates clearly where the minutes end and his own comments begin. The pamphlet on the disputation in The Hague only circulated in print after Coornhert's death.[9] The stewards of his legacy gathered together all the documents relating to the disputation, including the minutes. The reader of this pamphlet could see from a number of Coornhert's letters and petitions just what his personal view of the debates had been, and so, in turn, how the formal record of the discussions was to be interpreted.

---

[7] On the religious disputation at Haarlem between Catholics and Reformed, see Bonger, *Life and Work*, 34–35. So far as is known, the government was not involved in this debate.

[8] D. V. Coornhert, *Sendt-brief van D. V. Coornhert, met antwoorde van de twee predicanten te Delft daer op, ende replijc van D. V. Coornhert*, in *Wercken* II, 259r.

[9] Printed in Gouda in 1617 by Jasper Tournay. P. H. A. M. Abels, "Spreekbuis voor dissenters: de drukkerij van Jasper Tournay," in *In de stad van die Goude* (Delft, 1992), 223–225.

In the present work, the ministers' views will receive at least as much attention as Coornhert's. They too proclaimed their views in pamphlets. Their writings sometimes directly influenced the policies of the States, as can be seen by comparing a number of resolutions adopted by the States of Holland with various manuscripts in the municipal archive of Delft, including a memorial to Nicolaas van der Laan.[10] This material also shows that Coornhert's reporting of the circumstances leading up to the debates in Leiden and The Hague is incomplete. He neglects to mention some events, in order to deflect from his generally unaccommodating stance, which seriously hampered the course of the debates. This is not to direct 'blame' at Coornhert. We must bear in mind here that he was in a desperate position. As the outcome of the debates had been fixed in advance, Coornhert could not but resort to 'wayward action' in order to defend his case. Still, the present study, without itself taking either side in the polemics of the time, serves to balance previous accounts of the disputations that uncritically reproduce Coornhert's (at times unreliable) version of events.

The source material provides little personal information about the participants in the disputations. At most, the number and lengthiness of their writings—especially the extensive manuscript treatises—bear witness to their commitment to the triumph of their theological positions. Both Coornhert and the ministers were indefatigable. They engaged in polemics in their spare time, alongside day jobs as, respectively, notary public and local pastors. Their participation in the disputations laid heavy demands on their time, as they regularly complained.

At first sight the greatest inequality between the parties lay in the conditions under which they laboured. The extensive collections of the letters of the ministers Tilius, Cornelisz and Saravia show that they each had a widely ramified network of correspondents. Parts of their training had been abroad, in Heidelberg for instance, and they were esteemed figures in Reformed circles. They maintained close ties with Orange's court preachers, who in turn had ready access to confidants of the Prince, such as Philip Marnix of Sint Aldegonde (1540–1598) and Adriaan van der Mijle (1538–1590). [11]

---

[10] See pp. 189–191, 210–212.

[11] Van der Mijle was a Councillor of State and in 1583 was appointed president of the Court of Holland. *NNBW* 8:1190–1191.

Coornhert, in contrast, stood alone. At least, his repeated references to the confrontation between David and Goliath seem designed to give this impression. He emphasized that he was obliged single-handedly to take on a team of ministers that had the backing of the States. The Reformed pamphlets, remonstrances and petitions that were an important part of the controversy with Coornhert were indeed the product of a collaborative process involving the Delft ministers Tilius, Cornelisz and Donteclock. After Tilius was called to Antwerp in 1579, his direct involvement in the Coornhert affair came to an end; on the eve of the Hague disputation, however, Saravia—a theologian of international renown—provided the necessary back-up.

In the aftermath of the disputation in The Hague, Cornelisz and Donteclock suggested that Coornhert derived a certain status from what he himself portrayed as his solitary position. He, an autodidact, had single-handedly taught the eminent scholar Saravia a lesson, even though the latter had been able to call on two assistants, Cornelisz and Donteclock. Coornhert's extensive correspondence, however, reveals that his position was much less isolated than he wished his sympathisers and his opponents to think. [12] His correspondents included leading regents and scholars, such as Dirck van Egmond van der Nieuburgh (1537–1596), a member of the High Council, Cornelis de Groot (1546–1610), Leiden's professor of jurisprudence, Hendrik Laurensz. Spiegel (1549–1612),[13] an erudite Amsterdam merchant, and Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598), [14] the famous Antwerp cartographer. Coornhert's 'unlearnedness' was also relative, although it is true that he lacked formal schooling. As a translator of the classics he and a number of friends had founded a printing shop in Haarlem, and as an engraver he collaborated with Maarten van Heemskerck (1498–1574), whom he provided with ideas for his religious pictures. [15] In the mean

---

[12] *Bronnen tot de kennis van het leven en de werken van D. V. Coornhert*, ed. Bruno Becker, RGP, kleine ser., 25 (The Hague, 1928), 197–347.

[13] On the correspondence between Coornhert and Spiegel, see Johan Koppenol, "The early reception of Montaigne in Holland: Van Hout, Coornhert and Spiegel," in: Paul J. Smith and Karl A. E. Enenkel, *Montaigne and the Low Countries* (1580–1700) (Leiden/ Boston, 2007), 141–172, esp. 157–166.

[14] On the relation between Coornhert and Ortelius, see Jason Harris, "The religious position of Abraham Ortelius," in: Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. de Jong, Marc van Vaeck (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*. Intersections Yearbook for Early Modern Studies 3 (Leiden, 2004), 89–137, esp. 131–134.

[15] Paul Valkema Blouw, "A Haarlem Press in Sedan and Emden (1561–1569). Part 1: Haarlem," *Quaerendo* 19 (1989), 225–250; Ilja M. Veldman, *Maarten van Heemskerck*

time, his work as a notary provided a regular income. In 1562 he was appointed secretary to the city of Haarlem. In this function he met leaders of the Revolt, including the Prince of Orange.

Both Coornhert and the ministers moved in an extensive network of patrons and sympathisers. But it is still difficult to say with any certainty just how extensive their support was. In the past few decades much work has been done on the slow building up of the Reformed Church and the smallness of its membership in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century; there is little in the way of numerical evidence for the *liefhebbers* (sympathizers) who attended Reformed services without receiving communion.[16] We do—exceptionally—have quantitative data concerning the pamphlet by Danaeus mentioned above. According to the historian Olivier Fatio, about a thousand copies of this treatise were printed.[17] This agrees with the estimates of Craig Harline, who speaks in general of runs of 1,000 to 1,250 copies. Because every copy sold would have multiple readers, and furthermore reprints were not uncommon, Harline applies a factor of 50 (per copy) to estimate ultimate readership in the seventeenth century. [18] The figure would presumably be lower for the sixteenth century, given the lower literacy rates.

We know nothing about the print runs of Coornhert's numerous pamphlets, so we can only guess at their reach. The records of the consistory of Delft do make mention of a few cases of punishment for openly supporting Coornhert's ideas, but these acts do not give a representative picture, so cannot support quantitative conclusions. [19]

---

and Dutch Humanism in the Sixteenth Century (Maarssen, 1977), 53–93; Idem, *De wereld tussen goed en kwaad: De late prenten van Coornhert* (The Hague, 1990).

[16] Alastair Duke and Rosemary L. Jones, "Towards a Reformed Polity in Holland, 1572–1578," *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 89 (1976), 373–393; W. Bergsma, *Tussen Gideonsbende en publieke kerk: Een studie over het gereformeerd protestantisme in Friesland, 1580–1650* (Hilversum, 1999), 96–137.

[17] Craig E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic*, Archives internationales d'histoire des idées 116 (Dordrecht, 1987), 21, 96–97; Olivier Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine: Contribution à l'étude de l'établissement de la discipline ecclésiastique aux Pays-Bas ou Lambert Daneau aux Pays-Bas (1581–1583)*, Kerkhistorische bijdragen 2 (Leiden, 1971), 80.

[18] Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture* , 21.

[19] P. H. A. M. Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien: Kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland, 1572–1621*, vol. 2, *De nieuwe samenleving* (Delft, 1994), 160–161. On consistory records as a historical source, see Judith Pollmann, "Off the Record: Problems in the Quantification of Calvinist Church Discipline," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33 (2002), 423–438.

Furthermore, an accusation of 'Coornhertism' was not very specific. Ministers used the word 'Coornhertist' as a fairly general term of abuse, much as they did 'libertine', 'Pelagian' and 'Schwenckfeldian'. [20] In 1608 Donteclock described the supporters of Coornhert and of the German spiritualist Sebastian Franck (1499–1542) as "the largest sect to be found in this country." But even such a declaration offers no certainty about the exact numbers of so-called 'Coornhertists'. [21]

Although Coornhert was presumably not bereft of all support, his performance was that of a born soloist. His idiosyncrasy became apparent at an early age, when the 17-year-old Coornhert braved maternal disapproval to marry his beloved Cornelia ("Neeltje") Symonsdochter.[22] Coornhert was a firebrand, but he should not be seen as a mere troublemaker. He fought the Reformed ministers on their home ground, and the keenness of his arguments could put esteemed theologians in a tight spot. At the same time, he kept abreast of the lively theological discussions of his time, but felt kinship with no particular ecclesial community. Coornhert regarded the Catholic Church as the one true church, but considered it corrupted. He no longer attended Mass; he could not see how ecclesiastical ceremonies might contribute to individual salvation.

Coornhert has often been portrayed as an ecclesial orphan, one of the "stepchildren of Christianity", the "chrétiens sans église", who wished to follow "neither Rome, nor Geneva." [23] In this respect he was far from alone. In the late-sixteenth-century Netherlands up to half the population might be counted among the so-called *neutrales* or undecided, those unable or unwilling to come down on one side or the other.[24] To conclude from this that Coornhert attributed little or no

---

[20] On the various names for 'spiritualist' thinkers, see M. E. H. N. Mout, "Spiritualisten in de Nederlandse Reformatie van de zestiende eeuw," *BMGN* 111 (1996), 298–299.

[21] Cited in W. Bergsma and S. Zijlstra eds., "De lezing 'Mystiek en spiritualisme in de Nederlanden der zestiende eeuw'," *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 26 (2000), 162.

[22] H. F. K. van Nierop, "Coornherts huwelijk: een bijdrage tot zijn biografie," *BMGN* 106 (1991), 33–44. For a concise biographical overview, see I. Schöffer, "Coornhert (1522–1590)," in *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht* (Zutphen, 1989), 9–17.

[23] J. Lindeboom, *Stiefkinderen van het Christendom* (The Hague, 1929); Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église: La conscience religieuse et le lieu confessionnel au xvii^e siècle* (2nd edition; Paris, 1987); Thierry Wanegffelen, *Ni Rome ni Genève: Des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1997).

[24] Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in Utrecht, 1578–1620* (Oxford, 1995), 68: "The single most significant fact for the

importance to the visible church is to put too one-sided an emphasis on the 'spiritual' element in his thought. [25] The question of the visible church was an important one for the struggles in which Coornhert found himself involved. The visible community of God was certainly important to him.

Troubled Times

The disputations in Leiden (1578) and The Hague (1583) took place amidst considerable unrest. These were the very years that the Revolt against Philip II was radicalized. [26] In the course of 1577 it became clear that the compromises reached in the Pacification of Ghent (1576) were unsustainable as a basis for the restoration of peace and order in the Low Countries. [27] This peace treaty between the rebel provinces (Holland and Zeeland) and the States General collapsed under the pressure of the military advances of the king's new governor general, Don Juan. His taking of the citadel of Namur in July 1577 brought the conflict back to boiling point. "When Don Juan broke the peace, the Pacification had essentially failed", says Woltjer.[28] The deputies of the States General had in Ghent adopted a reconciliatory stance towards the representatives of the rebel—and officially Protestant—provinces Holland and Zeeland. This conciliatory mood evaporated as soon as the Pacification threatened to lead to armed struggle with Don Juan.[29]

As the war intensified, with the army of the States suffering defeat at Gemblours in January 1578, more moderate members of the States General were obliged to take sides. The majority refused to take up

---

religious history of the Netherlands c. 1578–1620 is the extraordinary number of people who belonged to no church at all."

[25] See Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, "Coornhert, een eigenzinnig theoloog," in *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht* (Zutphen, 1989), 21.

[26] For a general overview of the period, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1977), 169–198; Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995) 184–204; A.Th. van Deursen, *De last van veel geluk. De geschiedenis van Nederland 1555–1702* (Amsterdam, 2004), 71–115. The failure of the Pacification of Ghent is described in J. J. Woltjer, "De vredemakers", in *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog: Over de Nederlandse Opstand, 1555–1580* (Amsterdam, 1994), 64–88.

[27] M. Baelde, "De pacificatie van Gent in 1576: hoop en twijfel in de Nederlanden," *BMGN* 91 (1976), 369–393.

[28] Woltjer, "Vredemakers", 86.

[29] Ibidem, 79.

arms alongside a Protestant ally, for whom they felt considerable mistrust, against the representative of royal power. This lack of trust was, moreover, mutual.[30] A parting of the ways seemed militarily unavoidable. In 1579 the Union of Utrecht was established, over against the Union of Arras. These military alliances were intended to be temporary, until the unity of the Netherlands was restored. The settlement of religion contained in the Union of Utrecht was also meant to be temporary. In Holland and Zeeland the Reformed kept their exclusive status, but the principle of freedom of conscience was assured; the other provinces could determine the issue of religion as they thought best, or adopt *godsdienstvrede* (religious peace), a confessional truce of the sort promoted by the Prince of Orange. This type of formal agreement would—with certain mutual restrictions—guarantee freedom of worship to both Catholics and Protestants. [31]

For the States of Holland the years after the failure of the Pacification were marked by the threat of invasion by hostile forces. The triumphal progress northwards of Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma, an able strategist and a clever diplomat, was of serious concern to the Hollanders from 1579 onwards. The Revolt's success was fragile; no certain predictions could be ventured of how the civil war in the Netherlands would end.

Both the Reformed clergy and Coornhert himself applied a degree of self-censorship to their polemics, with one eye on the country's unsettled circumstances. At least, they all expressed the view that some such caution should be observed. In practice the polemics often reached a high pitch notwithstanding. In September 1579 it nevertheless seemed unwise to Van der Corput, minister at Dordrecht, to react to Coornhert's latest provocation, an open letter to the ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock. "Your answer was right", Van der Corput wrote to Cornelisz, "yet we thought composed in too sharp a wording, and in particular not serviceable to the times." [32] In the mean time the States had prohibited Coornhert from publishing anything

[30] Ibidem, 81–85.

[31] O. J. de Jong, "Unie en religie", in *De Unie van Utrecht: Wording en werking van een verbond en een verbondsacte* , ed. S. Groenveld en H. L. Ph. Leeuwenberg (The Hague, 1979), 156–157, 168–169.

[32] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 26 September 1579, in *Brieven uit onderscheidene kerkelijke archieven*, ed. H. Q. Janssen and J. J. van Toorenenbergen, WMV, ser. 3, part 2 (Utrecht, 1878), 113.

further on religious issues. For this reason Van der Corput thought it unwise to reply to Coornhert and "make a disturbance."[33] The minister advised deploying the authority of the States. A letter should be sent to Coornhert explaining that the ministers were ready to answer him, but that the continuation of the dispute could not sit well with the measures taken by the States. [34]

A strident reaction to Coornhert's writings could damage the relationship between the ministers and the States, who had no desire for religious polemics. Van der Corput therefore advised Cornelisz to notify the States of his willingness to drop the controversy with Coornhert.[35] The States had to be convinced by any means possible that the ministers meant well and wished to preserve domestic peace. [36] Coornhert too realized that public quietness and order, and his relations with the government, would not allow too critical an attitude on his part. In 1583 he had withheld a salty reaction to a petition that the clergy had addressed to the States concerning the polemic, "considering the weightiness of the affair." Personal animosities, leading to nothing but "hatefulness", threatened to predominate. Coornhert was of the opinion that theological debate, "this Christian affair", had to be conducted "with Christian affection."[37] He repeatedly tried to shift blame on to the ministers for the way in which the controversy kept degenerating into recrimination. He was keen to keep his own name clear—in the eyes of the States as much as anyone.

The States' aversion to disturbances of any type was well known. Domestic disquiet weakened the front against the enemy, which was something the government was in no position to allow. Because a public debate on religious matters was considered highly likely to inflame passions, it is no surprise that both Coornhert and the ministers did everything they could to deny having given the slightest provocation to the disputation in Leiden. Each party placed the blame squarely on

---

[33] Ibidem.
[34] Ibidem.
[35] Ibidem.
[36] In the mean time the damage had been done. Cornelisz and Donteclock had sent a strongly worded reply to Coornhert on their own account. The contents can be reconstructed from D. V. Coornhert, *Sendt-brief van D. V. Coornhert, met antwoorde van de twee predicanten te Delft daer op, ende replijc van D. V. Coornhert*, in *Wercken* II, 257r–267r.
[37] D. V. Coornhert, *Theriakel teghen het venijnighe wroegh-schrift by Arent Cornelisz. ende Reynier Donteclock Delfsche predicanten (die dat noemen Remonstrantie) aan den H. H. Staten van Hollandt* (Gouda, 1610), [3].

the other.[38] Even after the authorities had issued a series of prohibitions against Coornhert, his regard for the authority of the States was undiminished. In 1582, at the request of the central government, he even publicly tore up one of his treatises. [39] He presented himself as a "public person" defending the freedom of religion and freedom of conscience of his fellow citizens, but he never openly took issue with the right of the States to limit his own freedom. The authority of the States was beyond question.

Nonetheless, the ministers accused Coornhert of defying the authority of the States. They considered his criticism of the Reformed Church an attack on the government, which had, after all, given their confession the status of 'public church'. In 1579, when Coornhert described a treatise by the clergy concerning the distinction between the temporal and spiritual powers as "ruinous to the country", the ministers saw this as implying that the States, too, had operated in a manner that had been both "indiscreet and ill-considered."[40] The treatise in question had been submitted to the States prior to publication, and the States had apparently been unable to discern the dangerous nature of the work.[41]

The widespread fear and insecurity arising from the war in the Low Countries made the times ripe for imputations and insinuations. Of at least equal weight—considering the uncertain situation in the Netherlands—were the doubts that the ministers sowed concerning Coornhert's loyalty to the fatherland. [42] In 1572 he had "disloyally" left Holland, and once in foreign parts he had not failed to mock his fatherland in his writings. [43] In the eyes of the ministers, Coornhert's

---

[38] D. V. Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [9v]–[10r].

[39] Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 16, 22r.

[40] D. V. Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 261r. The treatise itself, entitled *Kort ende schriftmatigh gevoelen der kercke Christi, van de gemeenschap ende onderscheydt, d'welck tusschen die politische ende kerkelijcke regeringe is* , does not survive. Coornhert refers to the piece in his *Sendt-brief* (1579) and in the *Justificatie* of the magistrates of Leiden (1579).

[41] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 261v.

[42] In the Early Modern period, the exact bearing of the term 'patria' was always dependent on context. In this case the ministers mean Coornhert's loyalty to Holland. S. Groenveld, "Natie en patria bij zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanders," in *Vaderland: Een geschiedenis vanaf de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940*, ed. N. C. F. van Sas, Reeks Nederlandse begripsgeschiedenis 1 (Amsterdam, 1999), 62; E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier, "Het begrip 'vaderland' in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving van de late zestiende eeuw tot de eerste helft van de achttiende", in *Vaderland*, ed. Van Sas, 181.

[43] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 264r.

rabble-rousing against the Reformed Church weakened the front against the Spaniard. Coornhert's criticism was grist to the Catholic mill, the ministers informed the States in 1583. [44] In 1581 Coornhert had communicated representations to the States on behalf of a group of Roman Catholics in Haarlem. Although the ministers could hardly accuse Coornhert of "Roman" sympathies, given his aversion to the pope and all forms of Catholic "idolatry", their reproaches did put him in a difficult position. Particularly after the defection of the Frisian stadholder Rennenberg in 1580, any association with Catholicism was suspect, and conspiracy theories were rife. [45] Coornhert repeatedly expressed his displeasure at the detraction poured out on him from the pulpit week after week.

Of course, Coornhert also went on to the offensive. Just like the ministers, he sought to weaken his opponents' position by referencing the uncertainty of the wartime situation. Hard-won freedoms were being snatched back by the ministers, who were attempting to institute a "Genevan inquisition" in a country that had so long groaned under popish tyranny. [46] Coornhert feared that the Reformed clergy would abuse their privileged position as servants of the public church. They would show themselves true disciples of Calvin and Beza and put pressure on the States to start persecuting heretics. In 1579 the ministers stated black on white that "the duty of the authorities is [. . .] to punish [. . .] those who disturb the external peace of the church", [47] Coornhert responded with dismay. "For it truly amazes me", he wrote to the ministers, "that you have dared prescribe to the Lord States (in times like these) such draconian bloody laws in the bountiful wealth of Christ's mercy."[48]

Coornhert's accusations touched a nerve with the clergy. The execution in Geneva of the Spanish anti-Trinitarian Michael Servetus (1511–1553) was a *cause célèbre*, which had aroused much debate

---

[44] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie aen mijn Heeren de Staten slandts van Hollandt [. . .] in de welcke gheantwoort wordt op eenen brief van Dirck Cornhert aen de voorsz. Staten, ghedruct vooor een boecxken, ghenaemt, Proeve des Nederlandtschen Catechismi* (Delft, 1583), 9.

[45] Van Nierop describes a "hysterical campaign [. . .] against suspected traitors" in North Holland in 1575. This took on the character of a "witch-hunt". Henk van Nierop, *Het verraad van het Noorderkwartier: Oorlog, terreur en recht in de Nederlandse Opstand* (Amsterdam, 1999), 16.

[46] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [14r].

[47] In the aforementioned treatise *Kort ende schriftmatigh gevoelen der kercke Christi* (1579).

[48] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 260v.

within Coornhert's lifetime. For his tirade against the supposed bloodthirstiness of the Reformed ministers Coornhert must have found inspiration in the writings of Sebastian Castellio (1515–1563), who had denounced the execution of Servetus in particular, and any kind of heresy-hunting in general. [49] Coornhert played on the populace's fear of renewed bloodshed. The question of how far this fear was based on a real threat from the Reformed is difficult to answer. The spectre of religious persecution was still very much alive, among the Reformed clergy as much as anyone. [50] They emphatically denied any desire to touch freedom of conscience or to put heretics to death. Furthermore, the ministers only argued for the punishment of heretics who publicly attacked the church.[51] To Coornhert, such nuances mattered not at all; his opinion of the ministers was fixed. His was a particular reading of a number of phrases that were far from unequivocal, as he indirectly admitted in his response to the aforementioned treatise of 1579: "How broadly each of these words could be stretched by a mind eager to shed blood, any prudent man can easily imagine." [52] In practice, Coornhert argued, nothing would stand in the clergy's way.

Maintaining national unity was important to the States and to the Reformed clergy, but just as crucial to Coornhert. Disputes and divisions among the people could still cause the Revolt to fail. Coornhert and his contemporaries interpreted the state of the country in religious terms. Disasters and disorders in the world around them were taken to be signs of a collective lack of piety.[53] National unity required a church and a government with undisputed authority. Coornhert was as convinced of this as were the Reformed clergy. Nevertheless he reached very different conclusions about what sort of religious settlement was desirable in Holland. The debate came to focus on the status of the Reformed Church as public church.

---

[49] Hans R. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio, 1515–1563: Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz im konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Göttingen, 1997), 80–106.

[50] Tilius, for instance, endured fearful times in Antwerp in 1585, as the troops of Parma advanced on the city. Tilius to Cornelisz, 4 February 1585, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 170.

[51] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [12r]; *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts ende ouderlinghen der kercken van Hollandt [. . .] aen mijn E. E. Heeren de staten desselven landts, op de remonstrantie by de overicheyt van Leyden, aen de voorsz Heeren Staten ghedaen* (Delft, 1582), [32–36].

[52] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 261r.

[53] Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)* (Manchester, 1999), 198–201.

A Public Church

The Reformed ministers in Holland shared in the great uncertainties of the time. The fate of the Reformed Church was closely tied to the success of the Revolt against Spanish authority.[54] In Holland the accession (or surrender) of a town to the Revolt generally meant that a Reformed minister could mount the pulpit.[55] In this manner the earliest Calvinists, united in the so-called 'churches under the cross', were rewarded for their financial and moral support for the rebels.[56] The groundwork for a Reformed public church in Holland, emerging along presbyterian/synodal lines from 1572 onwards, was laid by the organization of the Reformed churches in exile.[57] That is to say, the local churches were governed by consistories, which at a regional level were grouped in classes and synods.[58]

The Reformed Church in Holland functioned as a 'public body'. In Van Deursen's words, the authorities felt themselves "bound" to the Christian Reformed religion and recognized that church as the

---

[54] J. J. Woltjer and M. E. H. N. Mout, "Settlements: the Netherlands", in *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 2, *Visions, Programmes, and Outcomes*, ed. Thomas A. Brady Jr., Heiko A. Oberman and James D. Tracy (Leiden, 1995), 397–408; Andrew Pettegree,*Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 170–192; J. Pollmann, "The Low Countries", in: Alex Ryrie (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in the European Reformations* (Basingstoke, 2006), 80–101.

[55] In recent decades there has been intensive study of urban reformations in the towns of Holland, including: H. ten Boom, *De Reformatie in Rotterdam*, Hollandse Historische Reeks 7 (Amsterdam and The Hague, 1987); J. Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie: Stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven, 1577–1620* (The Hague, 1989); A. Ph. F. Wouters and P. H. A. M. Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien: Kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland 1572–1621*, vol. 1, *De nieuwe kerk*; vol. 2, *De nieuwe samenleving* (Delft, 1994); and Christine Kooi, *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620* (Leiden, 2000).

[56] For the importance of the refugee churches to the Reformation in Holland, see A. Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford, 1992); Marnef outlines the growth of the underground congregations in Antwerp in Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577*, tr. J. C. Grayson, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, ser. 114, vol. 1 (Baltimore, 1996).

[57] A crucial role in this development was played by the Synod of Emden (1571). J. J. Woltjer, "De politieke betekenis van de synode van Emden," in *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog* (Amsterdam, 1994), 89–120.

[58] Paul H. A. M. Abels, "Tussen gewetensvrijheid en kerkelijke dwang: Religie in Holland", in *Geschiedenis van Holland 1572 tot 1795*, ed. Thimo de Nijs and Eelco Beukers (Hilversum, 2002), 288–289.

"national manifestation of the said faith". [59] The States did not extend protection to a church of a small minority, but to a church that served the common good. In so far as this church preached 'tolerance' of other faiths, one could by definition speak of inclusive toleration. That is to say, that 'dissidents' were to be incorporated into the church. [60] This was true even of Coornhert. The ministers explained his exclusion not in the first instance on the basis of his theological ideas, but of his unremitting condemnations of the Reformed Church as a sect.[61] A firebrand like Coornhert could hardly be brought inside.

The actions of the 'servants' of the Reformed Church were very much characterized by their church's universal pretensions. Strangely, this has not become part of the historical image, which is dominated by the struggle between proponents of a 'broad church', a church of the people that could find a place for all citizens, and the champions of a 'narrow church', maintaining strict discipline, making high demands of its members and rejecting any form of government interference. The latter 'party'—historians generally conclude—was to triumph. [62] Measured by religious ratios in Holland there was indeed much to be said against the 'general' status of the Reformed Church. Indeed, the minority position of the Reformed Church seemed a far cry from universal aspirations. Nevertheless, the exclusivism of a theologian like Danaeus was not characteristic of the clergy of Holland. He regarded church discipline as a third mark of the true church (*nota ecclesiae*), after the preaching of true doctrine and the correct administration of the sacraments. More fundamental still was Danaeus's representation of the difference between the visible church and the invisible church (the community of the truly faithful) as a distinction *per accidens*.[63] That is to say, that the visible church differed from the invisible church

[59] A. Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen: Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarneveldt*, 3rd ed. (Franeker, 1998), 13. It should be noted that Van Deursen argues that the Reformed Church always rejected the concept of a 'popular' church (p. 23).

[60] Beza also argued for a church that left room for Protestants with different opinions. H. A. Speelman, *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid van de kerk* (Kampen, 1994), 215. I would like to thank Prof. Woltjer for this reference.

[61] See pp. 96–98.

[62] E.g. A. T. van Deursen, "The Dutch Republic, 1588–1780", in *History of the Low Countries*, ed. J. C. H. Blom and E. Lamberts, tr. James C. Kennedy (New York and Oxford, 1999), 151–152. In this chapter Van Deursen pushes his 'thesis' back into the 1570s.

[63] Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 78–79.

only in outward appearance. All true believers were to be found within her bounds.

Donteclock, minister at Delft, was not entirely comfortable with this view, as can be seen from a line of thought he worked out on a scrap of paper.[64] On the basis of an exercise in logical reasoning, Donteclock holds that Danaeus's view of the invisible church as a group of the elect within the visible church, cannot be reconciled with Danaeus's view of the visible church as a clearly delineated institution. Without making it explicit in his jottings, Donteclock was in fact arguing to retain the visible church as a recognizable beacon at the expense of a clear category for all who might be elected to salvation (the true believers). The latter might also be found outside the visible church, a possibility excluded by Danaeus's ecclesiology. In his brief response to Danaeus, Donteclock provides a blueprint of the ecclesiological thought of the Reformed clergy of Holland. They were in favour of a clearly recognizable visible church, but held that true believers could also be found outside this church.

Protestant belief was not forced on the population by the authorities.[65] There was, rather, a clear discrepancy between the exclusive status of the Reformed Church, and the relatively small number of its adherents in the population as a whole.[66] In 1587 the Reformed still made up less than a tenth of the total population of Holland.[67] Religious pluriformity and a lack of direction 'from above' by a temporal prince or government body, had been essential characteristics of the Reformation in the Low Countries. The Reformed Church itself had been created 'from the bottom up', which continued to lead to difficulties after 1572, as it remained the church of a vulnerable minority.

---

[64] *Eenige aenteeckeninge Reyneri Donteclock genomen uut het boexken Danei vande kercken* (n.p.d.), GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 651.

[65] Duke and Jones outline the historiographical debate around Geyl and Rogier's 'Protestantization thesis': Duke and Jones, "Towards a Reformed Polity," 373–374.

[66] Ibidem, 378. Duke and Jones describe the position of the Reformed congregations as "legally anomalous and politically precarious." In Friesland the Reformed Church formed a similarly vulnerable minority: Bergsma, *Tussen Gideonsbende en publieke kerk*. Van Deursen has asked for more emphasis on the existence of 'sympathizers' as a supplement to the members registered in each congregation. Van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen*, 128–131.

[67] P. Bor, *Oorsprongk, begin en vervolgh der Nederlandsche oorlogen, beroerten en borgerlyke oneenigheden* II (Amsterdam, 1680), 975–976, cited in Duke and Jones, "Towards a Reformed Polity", 373.

The term that caught on for this church, expressly distinct from a 'state church' that all subjects were obliged to join, was 'public church'. [68]

Alastair Duke speaks of "the ambivalent face of Calvinism in the Netherlands." On the one hand the Reformed Church played a significant public role in the wider life of society. It had the sole right to solemnize marriages and baptize children, regardless of the confessional denomination of the bridal couple or the child's parents. Reformed ministers were, furthermore, paid out of public funds. On the other hand, the Reformed Church was highly selective in admitting worshippers to full membership, which seriously hampered rapid expansion. With regard to access to the Supper of the Lord, the Reformed congregations wished to maintain their 'purity'. Duke's position is that the public church in Holland condemned itself from day one to the status of a minority church. He draws a comparison with the ecclesiology of the rebaptizers and suggests that their presence in Holland strengthened the "latent sectarian tendency" already present within Calvinism.[69]

Duke refers to "the ambivalent face of Calvinism in the Netherlands". His concluding remarks to the similarly entitled article can be read as indicating that he only regards as Calvinists those who favoured a 'narrow church' with strict discipline. The "critics of the Calvinists" were chiefly magistrates but also included a few dissident preachers such as Hubert Duifhuis (ca. 1515–1581), Herman Herberts (ca. 1540–1607) and Caspar Coolhaes (1534–1615). These wanted a 'broad church', a church of the people, a body that could function as the public church not only in name but in fact. [70] In this view "the face of Calvinism" is not ambivalent in the least; there is no question of a division in Calvinism, but in the institutional Reformed Church. His perspective on the nature of Calvinism brings Duke—although his analysis is far less deterministic—close to Van Deursen, who states: "Dordrecht decided that the Reformed Church would continue along the path

---

[68] Nicolette Mout, "Staat und Calvinismus in der Republik der Vereinigten Niederlande," in *Territorialstaat und Calvinismus*, ed. M. Schaab (Stuttgart, 1993), 87–89.

[69] Alastair Duke, "The Ambivalent Face of Calvinism in the Netherlands, 1561–1618," in *International Calvinism 1541–1715*, ed. M. Prestwick (Oxford, 1985), 113–116, 128.

[70] Ibidem, 130–133.

taken in 1572."[71] In other words, any notion of a broad 'church of the people' was alien to the 'Calvinists' from the time of the first emergence of Holland's Reformed Church onwards. [72] This is a familiar image that still provides a framework for studies of the Reformation in the Low Countries.[73]

The question has to be faced whether the difference in thinking between proponents of a 'narrow' and a 'broad' church that emerged in the decades immediately after 1572 justifies a distinction between 'Calvinists' and 'critics of Calvinism'. It seems much more accurate to say that there was a range of opinions among Reformed ministers, with some being more flexible than others on doctrinal issues. Even figures whom Duke would have to count among the 'Calvinists', such as Tilius, Cornelisz and Saravia, were in this period wrestling with the issue of the 'visible church'. The rough and ready distinction between a 'narrow' and a 'broad' church fails to do justice to their positions. In his polemical writings Cornelisz occasionally adopted the combative tone characteristic of a threatened minority. [74] Nevertheless, this cannot lead one to conclude that over all he preferred a 'narrow' church to a 'broad' one. At most he judged a 'minority strategy' to be the most realistic in the shorter term. Cornelisz, and with him, one suspects, the majority of the ministers in Holland, were all too well aware that in the longer term only a 'majority strategy', with the chance to make the Reformed Church the state church, could provide lasting victory.

The transformation of the Reformed Church from a minority to a majority church was not just the desire of the magistrates and of a few dissident preachers. It was a desire widely shared by Reformed ministers. It can therefore be doubted whether the explosive conflict that took place in Leiden from 1579 onwards between supposed proponents and opponents of a 'narrow church' is representative of the weight of opinion within the Reformed Church at that moment in

---

[71] Van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen*, preface.

[72] Ibidem, 23.

[73] Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*; Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*.

[74] Cornelisz, for instance, stated: "For we are not supported by the great majority of people, who make an outward profession of religion, since this has never been the fate of truth, to be accepted by the majority of worldly people." Cornelisz, *Antwoordt op het schrift van Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert, waerinne hij een verclaringhe doet op zijns selfs eerste schrijven aen Thomas van Thielt predicant tot Delft, ende oock te kennen gheeft t'ghene dat hem in desselven predicants beantwoordinghe niet ghenoech doet* (n.p.d.), GAD, NHGem., inv. no. 636, 35.

time. This conflict, known as the 'Coolhaes affair', focused on the issue of whether the civic magistracy had the right, in consultation with the ministers, to determine ministerial appointments, as advocated by proponents of a 'broad church' such as the minister Coolhaes. [75] The latter, however, emerged the loser. Van der Corput, who was well informed of developments in the church, drew no general conclusions from this. He regarded the controversy as a private quarrel between two ministers, resulting from a lack of Christian brotherhood. He says nothing of a fundamental rupture within the church. To him, these "disturbances" were "of small account". [76]

Representatives of the Reformed Church presented their church as catholic and sought to refute any accusation of sectarianism. The controversy with Coornhert gave 'Calvinists' such as Tilius, Cornelisz and Saravia the opportunity to stand forth as the mouthpieces of a generally accessible Christianity. It should be remarked that the topics typifying the familiar 'narrow church' / 'broad church' debate, such as Eucharistic discipline or the manner of electing the consistory, played no role at all in the Coornhert affair. Coornhert's attack went to the very root of the Reformed Church and opened a debate about first principles beside which the debate about the narrowness or broadness of the church paled into insignificance.

According to the ministers their church was the visible "church of God" and could be recognized as such by its proclamation of the true doctrine of salvation and by the "purity" of its sacramental dispensation. [77] These marks of the Church revealed a "well-ordered" church, just as the ordering of a state was to be judged by the quality of its laws, and the ordering of a school by the quality of education. [78] The ministers deployed this comparison to indicate that "external" signs could serve to identify a "well-ordered" church. The analogy was lame to the extent that a church that met the criteria must by definition be the only one of its kind. The ministers, after all, were not representatives of a 'Calvinist' or a 'Reformed' doctrine, but of the universal Christian doctrine.

---

[75] Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 57–89.

[76] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 7 September 1579, in *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 107–108.

[77] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, GAD, NHGem., inv. no. 636, 19: "So then there is such a visible church that has pure doctrine and the right use of the sacraments, a well-ordered visible church, and we consider such to be our own."

[78] Ibidem.

The secular authorities had a duty to protect "true" religion. In Holland this duty fell to the Prince of Orange and the States of Holland. In 1582 a treatise was printed that gave the view of "ministers of religion and elders of the churches of Holland" on the relations between church and state.[79] According to the ministers, Orange and the States were to stand surety for the maintenance of the Reformed Church's monopoly in public life. [80] The ministers furthermore considered it self-evident that a "Reformed government" would act against heretics in accordance with "the censure of the church." The ministers considered as heretics those who called in question fundamental articles of faith.[81] The spoken and written word stood at the disposal of the secular authorities (ministers could be deployed in polemics and disputations), but "other procedures" were still an option. [82] In 1579 such examples were given as banishing, imprisoning or fining heretics, but one might also think of the prohibitions laid upon Coornhert, limiting his freedom to publish on religious issues. [83]

According to the ministers no church had ever existed without force. The authorities simply could not afford to allow all to do as they pleased. After all, heretics not only endangered "the exercise of pure religion," but also threatened "the civil peace and welfare of the city." The difficulty was applying compulsion in a just manner. The ministers stated with emphasis: "we affirm, that we have never desired to bring back in any popish tyranny or compulsion of consciences, but much rather teach and preach against the same daily, and hope to champion true liberty of conscience, to the last drop of our blood." This freedom of conscience expressly did not include freedom of expression. The ministers saw the latter as inevitably leading to "a ruinous license and excess" in which heretics could speak at will against God's honour and the country's peace.[84]

---

[79] See note 51 above.

[80] The States had promised "together with his Excellency to maintain only the exercise of the Reformed Evangelical Religion." *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts*, 32.

[81] *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts*, 30: "the thoughts of the godless, are that there is no God, that the Bible is not God's writ, but human words, also not of one voice, but contradictory to itself, that there is no Resurrection, no eternal life nor death, and other suchlike abominations."

[82] Ibidem, 32–33.

[83] D. V. Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 261r. Coornhert cited the treatise *Kort ende schriftmatigh gevoelen der kercke Christi* (1579), which has not survived; the series of prohibitions to which Coornhert was subject will be discussed in more detail below, pp. 172–174.

[84] *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts*, [30]–[36].

The "Christian freedom" that the ministers defended presupposed freedom of conscience and neighbourly love. [85] This freedom would not, however, be served by freedom of expression, denial of which the ministers in no way saw as a form of tyranny. They thought that they had made it clear enough "that freedom does not consist in expressing whatever is in one's heart, and that it is not always tyranny, when thoughts cannot be spoken freely." [86]

Scepticism

Coornhert took the view that freedom of conscience must by its nature include the freedom to practice a religion openly and give public expression to religious ideas. [87] The latter was particularly important to further religious debate. As far as Coornhert was concerned, the question of whether the Reformed Church actually was the 'Church of God' still had to be settled. So far as he could see, the Reformed had yet to present any "proof of the righteousness" of their teachings.[88] This meant that Coornhert was unable to accept the Reformed Church as the public church. He alleged that the States had still not given it unconditional support. "It is truly too early yet," he stated in 1579. The Coolhaes affair in Leiden, a city that was a "chief member of the Lord States," in his view proved that the authorities were resisting the ambitions of the Reformed Church.[89] Coornhert was convinced of the "benevolence and wisdom" of the States, and wrote that he was unable to believe that the government could be moved by "any's cry of *crucifige* [crucify him] to Pilatize, or to condemn any *parte inaudita*."[90]

---

[85] Ibidem, [37].

[86] Ibidem, [30].

[87] D. V. Coornhert, *Synodus of [weegschaal] tusschen [d'ou]de [ende] niew [vereffende kerk]. Vander conscientien vryheyt* ([Haarlem], 1582), 2:31. The chapter about freedom of conscience has the heading "Of the freedom of conscience both in belief and *in the exercise of such* " (emphasis added). In a petition to the magistrates of Haarlem in 1582/83 Coornhert stated that any prohibition regarding religious practice was a form of restraint of conscience. D. V. Coornhert, "Aen mijne E. heeren de burghermeesteren ende vroedtschappen der stede Haerlem," in *Wercken* 2:582r–582v. Van Gelderen suggests that freedom of religion and freedom of expression were, for Coornhert, the "external dimensions" of freedom of conscience. Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555–1590* (Cambridge, 1992), 258.

[88] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 261r.

[89] In the Coolhaes affair the magistrates of Leiden exercised themselves to safeguard their influence on the appointment of ministers and elders.

[90] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 262v. A free translation of *parte inaudita* would be "without hearing both sides."

For political reasons the choice of the Reformed Church as public church had become irreversible. It was an essential pillar of the struggle against the Spaniards. Coornhert, however, alleged that the policy on religion being followed by the States actually weakened the fatherland. The prohibition of Catholic worship in most of the towns of Holland in 1573 had embittered a considerable part of the population. Freedom of worship for Catholics would benefit "the security of this country against the Spaniards", and bring about the unity that Coornhert described as "the only bond of human capacity."[91] Although others must have shared Coornhert's views, he was in effect fighting a rearguard action. As long as the Union of Utrecht remained in force, the 'choice' of the States to favour the Reformed Church was fixed.

Coornhert argued that the "external church peace" of the Reformed lacked any basis in Scripture. It was built on a false doctrine.[92] The aplomb with which he proclaimed this message—and developed its implications, for instance with regard to the doctrine of Original Sin—gives the impression that he would find it just as easy to recognize true doctrine when it presented itself. In this, however, he was much cagier. He had no desire to be a teacher and furthermore took the position that curiosity about unnecessary knowledge could lead people to "neglect the necessity of living well."[93] In the meantime, the fierceness with which Coornhert attacked the falseness of Reformed teachings left the ministers with no choice but to respond.

According to Coornhert, the Reformed Church brought about an "impious peace." Because she was a false church, her leadership could never provide unity. In the debate about the true church, Coornhert took a sceptical position. The true, visible church was, in his view, "like a lily among thorns" in the sense that it could not as yet be known.[94] The many religious conflicts had deprived humanity of a clear view of the true church. For the present, the lack of a visible body had to be borne patiently. Coornhert took the view that humanity lacked a fixed criterion, a "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*), by which the claims of any given ecclesial community could be tested. Neither doctrine nor

---

[91] Ibidem, 266v.
[92] Ibidem, 263r.
[93] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [30r]; Idem, *Vande predestinatie, verkiesinghe, ende verwerpinghe Godes. Ontwarringhe* , in *Wercken* III, 172r.
[94] D. V. Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwang inder conscientien binnen Hollandt. Ghespraecke tusschen D. V. C. N. V. L.* , in *Wercken* 3:469v.

the administration of the sacraments, nor yet any other mark of the true church, gave decisive grounds. These were themselves subject to debate.[95] If they wished to demonstrate the legitimacy of their church, the ministers had to answer Coornhert's fundamental criticisms.

Coornhert's sceptical line of argument is characteristic of many Reformation debates. The lack of general acceptance of a single authority, such as the Catholic Church had once provided, gave rise to a vacuum of authority that meant that any theological dispute quickly turned into a discussion of the grounds of truth.[96] Appeals to sacred Scripture offered no solution. After all, who was to determine which interpretation was correct? Coornhert's disputations with the ministers about the identity of the true church suffered the same fate. The ministers saw Scripture as providing grounds for definitive statements of doctrine, which in turn indicated which was the true church, namely the church that held those doctrines, or in other words the Reformed. They had no sympathy for Coornhert's argument that widespread disagreement about a whole range of articles of faith made doctrine an uncertain mark of the true church. [97]

According to Coornhert the Bible was not itself divine, but a witness to the word of God. [98] He spoke of "Holy Writ" as inspired by God and contrasted it with "human writings" such as commentaries and catechisms.[99] Coornhert held that human understanding was not up to the task of providing conclusive dogmatic answers on the basis

---

[95] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [24r]–[24v].

[96] R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, rev. ed. (Berkeley CA, 1979) 1–17. The application of sceptical arguments in the theological debates of the Reformation was part of a more general revival of scepticism from the 15th century onwards. Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, History of Western Philosophy 3 (Oxford, 1992), 239–260.

[97] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [25r], [28r]–[28v]. The ministers put the rhetorical question: "There is almost no article of the Christian faith that has not at some time been disputed, aye that is not fought against at the present day, does this mean that there has never been certain knowledge of the Christian religion? Or that we can now have no true knowledge?"

[98] D. V. Coornhert, *Hert-spieghel der godlijcker schriftuyren, vertoonende een clare, corte, ende sekere wegh, om in dese werre-tijden de h. Schrift vruchtbaarlijck ende veylighlijck, sonder dolings angst te lesen* , in *Wercken* I, 3v: "For scripture is not Christ himself, but witnesses to him" and "The living word of God is itself the being, the light and the truth, but the written word is the image of the being, the lantern of the light, and the witness of the truth."

[99] Ibidem, 2r.

of Scripture.[100] He regarded as worthless those bold attempts to do so that were to be found reflected in "human writings". Scripture alone was "clear and sufficient in all that is necessary to salvation."[101]

When Coornhert spoke of religious knowledge, he did not mean knowledge of doctrine. During the Leiden disputation it became apparent that his pessimism with regard to human ability to plumb Scripture and his scepticism with regard to the identifiability of the true church, was not at odds with a declaration such as: "I […] labour […] by remaining in the words of Christ to come to the heavenly light of the knowledge of truth, so that I too should not be left without certain knowledge of which is here the rightful bride of Christ, meaning the true church of God." [102] The true church, however, could only be known by those who had left evil behind them and had learned to do good.

Coornhert regarded the Bible as a *hert-spieghel*: a mirror for the heart. This view was decidedly not anti-intellectual. After all, human persons needed "true knowledge of things" in order to keep to the right path.[103] In his ethica, *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste* (1586), Coornhert speaks of "well ordered knowledge [. ..] to attain learned virtue."[104] He regarded the distinction between human inclinations and desires as fundamental. Inclinations were natural and necessary to human thriving; desires were unnatural and led to sin. Humankind had to learn to distinguish between these two qualities.[105] Individual sanctification, explained in terms of growing out of sin, required knowledge, and above all else self-knowledge. "For without understanding one knows neither good nor evil." [106] Here it becomes clear that Coornhert was mixing Christian doctrine with Neo-Stoic notions. [107]

---

[100] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [25v]. "Now concerning the darkness I attribute the same not to Holy Writ as such, but to the eyes of the readers."

[101] Coornhert, *Hert-spieghel*, 6r. There has thus far been very little study of how Coornhert handled biblical material. Van Veen has made a first move in this direction. Mirjam van Veen, "'In allen gants suyver, ende ghenoechsaem': Dirk Volckertsz. Coornhert (1522–1590) en de bijbel," *NTT* 54 (2000), 310–325.

[102] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [30r].

[103] Coornhert, *Hert-spieghel*, 3r.

[104] D. V. Coornhert, *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste*, ed. B. Becker (Utrecht 1982) 7.

[105] B. Becker, "Coornhert, de 16de eeuwsche apostel der volmaakbaarheid," *NAKG* 19 (1926), 65.

[106] Coornhert, *Hert-spieghel*, 3r.

[107] Berkvens-Stevelinck, "Coornhert, een eigenzinnig theoloog," 22. For the general significance of Neo-Stoicism in the Dutch Revolt, see M. E. H. N. Mout, "Humanists and the Horrors of War: Neostoicism and the Revolt of the Netherlands," in *España*

With his forthright aversion to all "useless glosses" Coornhert moved the goal of biblical interpretation. Rather than poring over finer shades of dogmatic difference, sacred Scripture was to be regarded as the "bread of life." This was the way to learn to follow Jesus.[108] The proverb '*hoe geleerder, hoe verkeerder*' (the more learned the more wrong), which had wide currency in the late sixteenth century, expressed the same thought in more general terms. [109] Erasmus's *philosophia Christi* also offers an interesting comparison. The heart of the biblical message, this scholar asserted, lay in the imitation of Christ. Nobody advanced in godliness by learning ever more sophisticated ways of debating (for instance about the interpretation of biblical texts), but rather by becoming conscious, as a disciple of Christ, of an inner renewal. [110]

Although Coornhert considered it impossible to recognize true doctrine on the basis of Scripture, his attitude was not fundamentally sceptical.[111] He did believe in the possibility of acquiring 'true' knowledge, or of knowing with certainty. His attempts to order his thoughts on this matter through readings of classical authors such as Plato and Cicero resulted in a pair of epistemological treatises. [112] In these writings biblical texts were, moreover, a leitmotif.

Coornhert devoted a great deal of attention to the interpretation of Scripture. He outlined a series of rules for the application of logical methods of reasoning (*ratiocinationes* or *collectien*) to the explication

---

y Holanda: Handelingen van de Nederlands-Spaanse Historische Colloquia 1984–1988 , ed. H. de Schepper and P. J. A. N. Rietbergen (Madrid and Nijmegen, 1993), 109–118.

[108] Coornhert, *Hert-spieghel*, 2r.

[109] Carlos Gilly, "Das Sprichwort 'Der Gelehrten die Verkehrten' oder der Verrat der Intellektuellen im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung," in *Forme e destinazione del messaggio religioso: Aspetti della propaganda religiosa nel cinquecento* , ed. Antonio Rotondo (Florence, 1991), 229–375. The common English form, "The greatest clerks are not always the wisest men," is considerably weaker.

[110] Cornelis Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence* (Toronto, 1995), 86.

[111] Coornhert rejected academic scepticism after reading Arcesilaus, among other authors. According to him scepticism was difficult to stick to in practice. He put the following words in the mouth of the figure of a (perhaps fictional) rebellious pupil of the sceptic: "We dispute of these things in the schools one way, and we live here another way." Coornhert, "Onder andre der ouden opinien," in *Wercken* I, 520r.

[112] D. V. Coornhert, *Of men waarheyt mach weten,* in *Wercken* 1:78v–80v; Idem, *Korte berichtinghe vander ghedachten waarneminghe ende den naasten wegh om te moghen komen tot kennisse van sijns selfs state* , in *Wercken* I, 188v–190v.

of passages in the Bible.[113] In general he favoured an allegorical explanation following Augustine's example. [114] Coornhert quoted Augustine's *De tempore sermones*: "Should it be the case, brothers, that we take all these things related to us in the Old Testament solely after the letter, there will be no or very little gain to souls to be had from it." [115] An allegorical interpretation of Scripture made it possible to distil truths of faith from texts that were otherwise hard to make much sense of. [116]

Reformed ministers felt little for the dichotomy of 'letter' and 'spirit' that Coornhert made so much of. [117] They tended to give priority to a literal, historical interpretation of Scripture. In the sixteenth century new developments in biblical hermeneutics were generally characterized by a philological approach and a focus on the historical context of the places of Scripture. This pushed the medieval fourfold interpretative framework to the background. Calvin, for instance, feared that allegorical methods of scriptural interpretation were wide open to abuse. He did, however, recognize the importance of the prophetic character of the Old Testament, pointing forward to the coming of the Christ, and the (spiritual) meaning of Scripture as a guideline for godly living.[118]

In the disputations in Leiden and The Hague, Coornhert was willing to meet his Reformed opponents more than halfway on exegetical questions. Thus in Leiden he entered into a detailed debate about the characteristics of the Old Testament Jewish church, in which the kernel of the dispute was the implications of the *literal* (historical) sense

---

[113] Coornhert, "Tafelken vande maniere van bewijsinghe in schriftuyrlijcke saken," in *Hert-spieghel*, 28r–28v.

[114] D. V. Coornhert, *Negentich plaetsen der H. Schriftueren gheestelijck wtgheleydt, ofte gheallegoriseert door Aurelium Augustinum, ende vergadert oock vertaelt tot nut ende stichtinghe van allen gheestelijcke herten* (Gouda, 1585).

[115] Coornhert, *Negentich plaetsen*, [2r].

[116] A. E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1999), 157–158.

[117] Coornhert cited, for instance, the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 3:6): "the letter kills but the spirit gives life." The ministers ridiculed the notion of Coornhert as a follower of Origen. Coornhert, *Negentich plaetsen*, [1r–1v].

[118] Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 1995), 163–166; Irena Backus, "Bible", in *OER* 1:152–158; McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 157–161. Although the past few decades have seen increasing attention given to methods of biblical exegesis during the Reformation, there is still no general study. A number of specific studies can be found in Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays presented to David C. Steinmetz in honor of his sixtieth birthday* (Grand Rapids, 1996).

of biblical accounts, for instance of Christ's circumcision.[119] But the difference in exegetical positions also gave rise to problems. In the disputation in The Hague, for instance, Saravia wanted to look for an example of a biblical figure who had been completely obedient to God's commands; Coornhert saw no point to this historical question (which presupposed a literal interpretation of Scripture) and thought that he had already supplied sufficient reasons for human perfectibility. The grounds for these reasons included an allegorical interpretation of a number of passages from the Old Testament. [120]

Despite his strong sense of the limits of human ability to understand the meaning of Scripture and gain knowledge of "true" doctrine, Coornhert was happy to use biblical passages to support his theological case. He had little choice: theological debate, in the disputations in both Leiden and The Hague, was to be based on nothing but the Bible. Nor did Coornhert's methods indicate any sense of modesty, as might have been expected in light of his scepticism concerning the knowability of true doctrine. On the contrary, it was his unshakeable self-confidence that drew criticism. Coornhert might not think it possible to identify true doctrine, but he had no doubts about his own ability to unmask false doctrine.

On the issue of the visible church, too, Coornhert made firm statements about the *false* churches around him, while reserving judgement on the *true* visible church until a national ecclesial assembly should give judgement in the ecclesiological dispute. Several times in his writings he expresses the hope for such an assembly of representatives of the different confessions. It was a wish for the future, which he saw as a way of solving current religious issues. [121] Coornhert also voiced concerns about the validity of the decisions reached by church synods. Over the course of history, church councils had made various contradictory statements, and these were, furthermore, always to be regarded as the work of men, which meant that the possibility of error could not be excluded.[122] Coornhert was in favour of tolerating ecclesial plurality until such time as a prophet—"an Ezra"—should arise to point out

---

[119] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [24r].

[120] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 44–48.

[121] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 261r, 263v; Idem, *Bedencke vander Nederlanden noodt ende hulpe*, in *Wercken* I, 519v.

[122] See D. V. Coornhert, *Middel tot mindringhe der secten ende partijschappen staende dese inlantsche oorloghen, tot dat by gemeene eendracht daer in voorsien sal zijn, dienende* (Haarlem, 1581), 10–15.

the true church. Only then would there be an end to the "strange fires of diverse opinions" and the "confused Babylonian tongues" in the debate about the visible church. [123] Coornhert gave no opinion as to when this might take place. The moment for the repairing of ecclesial disunity lay in the future, beyond the range of forecast.

Coornhert categorically refused to give an opinion as to the marks of the true church. Only once, in 1578, did he give way and, at a friend's request, briefly outlined an impartial church, "as might be had in the wilderness of the multiplicity of these sects."[124] This was a private letter, not a printed treatise. Coornhert hardly took an intellectual exercise of this nature seriously and hedged his thoughts about with all sorts of reservations. It should be read as little more than an expression of good will towards his friend, whom he also sought to please with a tender piece of meat, enclosed with the letter. [125]

The letter sketches the features of a general church characterized by teaching and "at times" by ceremonies, by which Coornhert meant the administration of the sacraments. Religious teaching was to aim primarily at creating a habit of virtue (*habitus virtutum*) in the faithful and was to be exclusively based on the canonical books of the Bible and on the Apostles' Creed. According to Coornhert, the "maintaining of good ceremonies" was not in itself conducive to the spiritual growth of the faithful. Conversely, abandoning the sacraments was not a guarantee of escaping evil. Coornhert argued for both Baptism and Eucharist as supports for the faith of the weaker brethren. Should churchgoers want a full complement of sacraments (on the Catholic model), Coornhert saw no problem in providing it. Better to have lots of sacraments than to do without "sweet unity". In this church the office of teacher would be abandoned in favour of "exhortation under correction and that out of Holy Writ." Furthermore, true believers would also be found outside this church, "as they are in all churches or congregations, bearing the name of Christ." [126]

In the confusions of the times he lived in, Coornhert considered it wise to postpone any attempt to identify the one true church.

---

[123] Coornhert, *Synodus* 1:91. On the reception of the apocryphal Second Book of Ezra, see Alastair Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalypse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras (4 Ezra) from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1999).

[124] D. V. Coornhert, *Insicht over 'top-rechten van een alghemeyne uyterlijcke Christen kercke*, in *Wercken* I, 554r.

[125] Coornhert, *Insicht*, 554r.

[126] Ibidem, 554v.

This would create no problems for individual believers. Coornhert maintained the Nicodemite position that the true believer remained "untainted" by attending worship in a false church.[127] True faith was entirely independent of the visible church, as each individual reaches salvation individually, by leaving the evil and doing the good. This rebirth was made possible by divine grace. A proper application of the intellect enabled the acquisition of "knowledge of living well." In Coornhert's view, this moment of insight was preceded by acknowledgement of one's own ignorance. In his *Vande wedergheboorte* (1574; On Being Born Again) Coornhert described the various stages of a person's spiritual renewal.[128]

Coornhert quickly gained a reputation as a man with little respect for external religion. He was seen as anathematizing any form of state intervention in religious affairs, although he himself firmly denied this.[129] He even asserted the importance of the visible church: "I do not hold the opinion that no assemblies [of the faithful] should be called nor exercises of religion held."[130] What was at stake was not the salvation of each believer, but the welfare of society at large. In Coornhert's Nicodemite view, the believer remained "untainted" by taking part in the ceremonies of a false religion. But while this was true of the individual believer, it did not apply to the commonwealth. There was little sign of Nicodemism in 1579 when Coornhert stated that "it is a lesser evil to have no assemblies or exercises of religion than to have evil ones."[131] He indicated to his close friend Nicolaas van der Laan that the authorities were free to support a single church as long as freedom of religion remained intact.[132]

Coornhert regarded his times as a "night of unknowing."[133] An overhasty and exclusive choice in favour of a single church was therefore to be seen as taking chances with the collective wellbeing of the people. He shared the view of the ministers that the visible church was

---

[127] Van Veen, "*Verschooninghe van de roomsche afgoderye*," 166; Idem, "Spiritualism in The Netherlands: From David Joris to Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33 (2002), 138–140.

[128] D. V. Coornhert, *Vande wedergheboorte. Hoe die gheschiet, ende waar by de mensch mach sekerlijck weten of die in hem is gheschiet of niet*, in *Wercken* I, 177r–184v.

[129] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 264r, 266r.

[130] Ibidem, 267r.

[131] Ibidem.

[132] Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwangh*, 471v.

[133] Coornhert, *Synodus* 2:28.

to be a public body, tied to the unity of the country. But a false church, he firmly expected, could bring the country nothing but calamity, not least by promoting disunity. To prevent this, the magistrate had to be ready at any time to intervene to ensure that the church served the common good "in good order and subjection." [134]

[134] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 266r.

CHAPTER TWO

ROOM FOR DEBATE: A QUESTION OF TOLERANCE?

The Cult of Coornhert

The generally accepted historical interpretation of the disputations in Leiden and The Hague is to be found in the work of Hendrik Bonger (1911–1999), a historian who saw Coornhert's life and work in terms of the struggle for religious tolerance. [1]

Coornhert himself acknowledged that the growing intolerance of the Reformed ministers was his primary motive for taking a stand against the Reformed Church, a stand that led to, and included, the public debates in Leiden and The Hague. In the course of 1579 he declared that he would have given up his struggle with the ministers, were it not that by their "*bloedtleer*" (blood doctrine) "they would unsettle others in their faith." [2] Four years later Coornhert made a similar remark about his participation in the religious disputation in Leiden. He had been moved to make the journey to Leiden because of continuing attempts by the ministers to "make the magistrates executors of their opinions on the constraint of people's consciences." [3]

In Bonger's work a principled battle for religious tolerance lays down the framework for interpretation. The concomitant all-encompassing dichotomy, pitching a 'tolerant' Coornhert against a set of 'intolerant' ministers of the Word, still dominates Coornhert studies. Voogt, for

---

[1] Henk Bonger wrote his doctoral dissertation on Coornhert and also produced an authoritative biography, respectively: H. Bonger, *De motivering van de godsdienstvrijheid bij Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert* (Arnhem, 1954) and H. Bonger, *Leven en werk van D. V. Coornhert* (Amsterdam, 1978), the latter published in English as *The Life and Work of Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert*, translated, edited and annotated by Gerrit Voogt (Amsterdam and New York, 2004). Bonger also produced a Coornhert anthology, *Weet of rust. Proza van Coornhert*, ed. Henk Bonger and Arie-Jan Gelderblom (Amsterdam, 1993), and various occasional pieces and articles, including H. Bonger, *De dichter van het Wilhelmus: een kritische beschouwing* (Amsterdam, 1979), published on the occasion of Queen Juliana's seventieth birthday, and H. Bonger and Arie-Jan Gelderblom, "Coornhert en Sebastian Franck," *De zeventiende eeuw* 12 (1996), 321–339.

[2] *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 297.

[3] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [2r].

instance, maintains a similar focus in his examination of Coornhert's "contribution to the sixteenth-century debate on toleration" under the title of "Constraint on trial". It is important to realise that Coornhert and his adversaries were not involved in a *principled* debate on religious tolerance. This is a historical fiction. There was, in the sixteenth century, no sense of 'tolerance' as an abstraction or a high-flung principle. Instead, religious division was an everyday reality, prompting the question to what extent it was possible to "bear with" alternative views on grounds of pragmatism.

Of course, this is not to deny or belittle Coornhert's importance as a strong and relentless advocate of religious freedom. He reasoned that religious truth—now lost in a dark 'night of ignorance'—would emerge from an open debate only, requiring participants to choose their own brand of religion freely until unity had been restored. Coornhert was the first to write about such issues in the vernacular, which has earned him a special place in Dutch historiography. Nor should we ignore the fact that Coornhert was indeed in dire straits. The ministers closely allied with the States in an effort to set up disputations that aimed at silencing one of their most outspoken critics. Coornhert obviously felt cornered and vulnerable, and regarded his own predicament as illustrative of worse things still to come for society as a whole.

It is important to keep in mind that Coornhert significantly polarised the debate by brandishing his opponents as potential 'Genevan inquisitors'. Following in this groove, Bonger and others have forcefully narrowed down the scope of the controversy. In order to gain a full understanding of the disputations in Leiden and The Hague we also need to take into account the viewpoint of the ministers and the States, if only for the sake of balance. For instance, it is perfectly legitimate to query Coornhert's view of his opponents. Though it remains difficult to assess the extent to which Coornhert's fears of a "Genevan inquisition" were justified, raising the question may in itself prove illuminating. This line of reasoning, however, is wholly absent from Bonger's work.

The one-dimensional and ideologically infused view put forward by Bonger fails to probe at deeper-lying issues at stake. Coornhert's attack on the Reformed clergy's "*bloedtleer*" was part of a more general debate on the identity of the visible church. This took in a great many issues touching on ecclesial community, doctrine, and the relationship between church and state. In his thinking and writing, the fundamental problem "of the old church and the new" was Coornhert's

point of departure, not the presumed bloodthirstiness of the Reformed ministers. In this regard, Coornhert and the ministers faced the same challenge: how to solve the problem of religious division. Despite all enmity, they were interlocutors and found themselves to be companions in adversity.

The controversy between Coornhert and the ministers did not evolve along clear-cut lines of division, but would show itself to be a much more 'murky', less straightforward oppositional affair.[4] Yet, Bonger cum suis have made a caricature out of the dispute. They have reduced the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague to an ideological confrontation.[5] Bonger writes of a "spiritual struggle", far removed from the day-to-day reality of religious division.

Moreover, Bonger was not shy of sitting in judgement. Of the disputation in Leiden he wrote that: "Assessing and evaluating the entire affair, my judgment of Coornhert's 'performance' can only be favorable. He was justly angered by his unfair and humiliating treatment." [6] Bonger blamed the ministers for the "failure" of the debates. In Leiden they stopped Coornhert's mouth; in The Hague, where Coornhert might have faced a "high-minded debate," the performance of the theologian Saravia led to an interminable series of long speeches, until the debate petered out.[7] Nor, says Bonger, was Coornhert the only victim. Religious freedom lost the day in Leiden and The Hague, despite Coornhert's best efforts.

From the very beginning, Coornhert's historical reputation was based largely upon his own writings. Bor and Brandt were the first to quote his pamphlets and many more scholars were to follow, perhaps most

---

[4] Richard Bonney and David Trim warn that "the stark alternatives of oppression or toleration are not the only choices prompted by the emergence of religious diversity", see: Richard Bonney and D. J. B. Trim, "Introduction", in: Richard Bonney and D. J. B. Trim eds., *Persecution and Pluralism. Calvinists and Religious Minorities in Early Modern Europe 1550–1700.* Studies in the History of Religious and Political Pluralism 2 (Oxford/ Bern, 2006), 15–63: 19.

[5] In historical remarks concerning the development of the freedom of the press, Joris van Eijnatten discerns the same ideological bias, as though "a concept of freedom inherent to [our] national history unfolded over the course of time." He argues for "a less ideologically loaded typology of arguments for (and against) the freedom of the press." Joris van Eijnatten, "Van godsdienstvrijheid naar mensenrecht. Meningsvorming over censuur en persvrijheid in de Republiek, 1579–1795," *BMGN* 118 (2003), 21.

[6] Bonger, *Life and Work*, 74.

[7] Ibidem, 83–118, esp. 99.

famously Pierre Bayle (1647–1706).[8] The 'modern' Coornhert began to take shape in the course of the nineteenth century. As the notion of a national direction in Reformed religion gained significance, interest grew in historical figures that might be seen to have resisted the influence of 'outlandish' Calvinist hardliners. [9] Coornhert seemed to fit this mould.

The liberal historian Robert Fruin regarded him as "a man of the more modern age," whose sense of civic duty could be read in his "generous, open, broad face." [10] H. A. Enno van Gelder embroidered on this theme, identifying Coornhert's "libertine-Erasmian" tolerance as a harbinger of liberal thought. Bonger, finally, regarded Coornhert as a "rock of toleration," an indefatigable champion of religious tolerance. Haitsma Mulier points out that Bonger puts the struggle for religious freedom in the framework of an "almost modern, absolute contrast between good and evil." [11]

It is characteristic of Bonger's view that he explains the religious disputations as arising from the impact of Coornhert's ideas in the circles around the Prince of Orange. Thus the prince facilitated the large, public debate about the Heidelberg Catechism in 1583 as "a token of honour for his friend Coornhert." According to Bonger this was "a national event."[12] So the religious disputations became imbedded in the wider fight for freedom—in the broadest sense of the word—which in the period after the Second World War was symbolized above all by the Prince of Orange. [13]

Haitsma Mulier warns that Coornhert's later reputation went through a number of phases, in which each interpreter found the Coornhert

---

[8] On Bor and Brandt, see p. 6 above; Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 5th ed. (1740; facsimile edition Geneva 1995) III, 13–16.

[9] G. J. Schutte, "Het calvinistisch Nederland," in *Het calvinistisch Nederland: Mythe en werkelijkheid* (Hilversum, 2000), 13–14.

[10] E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier, "Coornhert in de geschiedschrijving," in *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht* (Zutphen, 1989), 160.

[11] Haitsma Mulier, "Coornhert in de geschiedschrijving," 169.

[12] H. Bonger, "Prins Willem van Oranje en Coornhert," in *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht* (Zutphen, 1989), 44–59, esp. 55.

[13] G. A. C. van der Lem, "De Prins in de geschiedschrijving van de laatste halve eeuw", in *Willem van Oranje in de historie, 1584–1984. Vier eeuwen beeldvorming en geschiedschrijving*, ed. E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier and A. E. M. Janssen (Utrecht, 1984), 191–219; Gees van der Plaat, "Willem van Oranje in beeld : van 'gezondene Gods om de tyrannye tegen te staen' tot machiavellist zonder religieuze overtuiging,", in E. C. Dijkhof and M. J. van Gent eds., *Uit diverse bronnen gelicht: opstellen aangeboden aan Hans Smit ter gelegenheid van zijn vijfenzestigste verjaardag* (Den Haag, 2007), 253–264.

that they sought.[14] During the Second World War a need seems to have been felt for a "sober and pious Netherlander." [15] Even before the War, Menno ter Braak, one of the most influential Dutch literary figures of the 1930s, laid claim to a Coornhert who, as a representative of an essentially Dutch "combative mean", defended an "active" as against a "lukewarm" form of tolerance. "We again find ourselves […] in something much like the situation of Dierick Volckertsz. Coornhert", Ter Braak wrote. Just as Coornhert had been trapped between "Roman" and "un-Roman", Ter Braak himself, in 1939, had to face both "communist" and "bourgeois." In the manner of Coornhert, Ter Braak encouraged his contemporaries to abandon their fence-sitting and to take an active stance in favour of toleration. [16]

Bonger, too, sought sympathy for Coornhert the loner, battling against the rest of the world. It was a fight, however, that bore fruit. Bonger refers to Coornhert as "one of the greatest testators of our civilization."[17] A principled toleration would triumph as a 'modern' value and become an essential part of Dutch culture. The alleged continuing influence of the sixteenth-century idea of tolerance in the modern age was long a commonplace. In the 1950s—at about the time Bonger was writing—came the work of Roland Bainton and Joseph Lecler. Lecler's monumental *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la réforme* situated the origins of the 'modern' principle of toleration in the sixteenth century. [18] As applied to the history of the Netherlands, this way of thinking retained a special significance for a long time. Even today there are those who, on historical grounds, regard the Dutch national character as fundamentally tolerant. [19]

---

[14] Haitsma Mulier, "Coornhert in de geschiedschrijving", 170.

[15] H. Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Studie over een nuchter en vroom Nederlander* (Lochem, 1941).

[16] Menno ter Braak, "Veroverend vertalen: Wat de verdraagzame humanist veroveren wilde", book review in the newspaper *Het Vaderland*, 5 November 1939.

[17] Bonger, *Leven en werk*, 411. Voogt renders this as "one of the greatest 'testators' of Dutch civilization" in *Life and Work*, 311.

[18] Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (New York, 1958); Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la réforme* (Paris, 1955). Compare István Bejczy, "*Tolerantia*: a Medieval Concept," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997), 365–384.

[19] E.g. Jan Willem Sap, "Voor de vrije Nederlanden en de eer van God: politieke tolerantie in de zestiende eeuw", in *De lege tolerantie: Over vrijheid en vrijblijvendheid in Nederland*, ed. Marcel ten Hooven (Amsterdam, 2001), 39–58, esp. 56–57.

Among historians, a somewhat less idealistic view of the development of the idea of tolerance has gradually gained ground. [20] E. H. Kossmann, who thought it meaningless "to compare the tolerance of then and the tolerance of now", took an important step in this direction.[21] In sharp contrast to today's constitutional principle of toleration, he characterized early modern thinking about tolerance as "undogmatic, pragmatic" and "only to a limited extent really based on principle." [22] Kossmann also distanced himself from those who "praise Coornhert as by far the greatest author on tolerance in the Netherlands." "They may perhaps be right", he conceded drily, before questioning just how far the implications of this might be stretched. [23]

Neither Kossmann's general remarks, nor the careful nuance of his comments on the lofty status of Coornhert, led to any new sense of perspective with regard to Coornhert's unique status as a defender of religious freedom.[24] The general view seems to be that Coornhert, surrounded by pragmatists of every description, was the only defender of a principled toleration of those of other beliefs, so that a necessary consequence of his thought would seem to be an institutionalized religious pluriformity. Coornhert did indeed make arguments from principle, which he presumably took from the writings of Castellio. [25] In this regard he found a kindred spirit in the Frisian statesman and scholar Aggaeus van Albada (ca. 1525–1587). [26] But Coornhert never regarded tolerance as a goal in itself. As a means to an end, a pragmatic policy of toleration could for the time being preserve the peace

---

[20] E.g. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra ed., *Een schijn van verdraagzaamheid: Afwijking en tolerantie in Nederland van de zestiende eeuw tot heden* (Hilversum, 1989); Hans Bots, "De Nederlandse verdraagzaamheid door de eeuwen heen: Mythe of realiteit," *Rekenschap* 45 (1998), 117–128.

[21] E. H. Kossman, "Tolerantie toen en nu," in *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis. Verspreide opstellen en voordrachten* (Amsterdam, 1987), 57.

[22] Kossmann, "Tolerantie toen en nu," 56–57.

[23] E. H. Kossmann, "Freedom in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought and Practice," in *The Anglo-Dutch Moment*, ed. J. I. Israel (Cambridge, 1991), 294.

[24] E.g. James D. Tracy, "Erasmus, Coornhert and the Acceptance of Religious Disunity in the Body Politic: a Low Countries Tradition?" in*The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, ed. C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden, 1997) 50. Tracy links Coornhert to "a more fully developed notion of toleration" that gave grounds for "a principled and explicit coexistence."

[25] Bonger indicates numerous points of agreement with Castellio: H. Bonger, *De motivering van de godsdienstvrijheid*, passim.

[26] Wiebe Bergsma, *Aggaeus van Albada (c. 1525–1587), schwenckfeldiaan, staatsman en strijder voor verdraagzaamheid* (Meppel, 1983), 95–105.

and create room for debate. Nevertheless, even today it is still almost anathema to say that this "sober and pious Netherlander" regarded any form of tolerance as a necessary evil, justifiable only so long as religious divisions persisted.

The dominant view of Coornhert has had its impact on the interpretation of the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague. Following Bonger, there are still historians who can refer to these debates as "a practical expression of Coornhert's concept of toleration", [27] or simply as an "exercise in toleration." [28] In the meantime only Willem Nijenhuis has offered an alternative view of one of these disputations. He interpreted the debate in The Hague as a "moment in the struggle between humanism and Reformation."[29] The strict dichotomy between humanism and Reformation has since been declared defunct, so that Nijenhuis's interpretation of the disputation in The Hague lacks a point of connection with more recent studies.[30] In general, historians remain in thrall to the tradition of Coornhert exegesis initiated by Bonger.

In spite of strong consensus, Coornhert's position in both national and international historiography does strike as unusual. Paul Oskar Kristeller declared that "in the history of philosophy the originality of a thinker stands in direct proportion to the ignorance of his [modern] interpreters."[31] In other words: the more we know about the history of ideas, the less any single figure stands out against the mental background of his or her time. It is a fate that Coornhert has escaped.

---

[27] Voogt, *Constraint on Trial*, 195.

[28] Abels, "Tussen gewetensvrijheid en kerkelijke dwang," 300.

[29] W. Nijenhuis, "Coornhert en de Heidelbergse Catechismus: Moment in de strijd tussen humanisme en Reformatie," *NTT* 18 (1963), 271–288. The same author dismissed Bonger's interpretation as a "monologue by Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert" which failed to do justice to the thought of his opponents. W. Nijenhuis, "Een monoloog van Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert", *NAKG* 60 (1980), 97–101.

[30] On the complex cross-fertilization between Humanism and the (early) Reformation see Peter Matheson, "Humanism and Reform Movements," in *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*, ed. Anthony Goodman and Angus McKay (London, 1990), 23–42; Nicolette Mout, "Erasmianischer Humanismus und reformierter Protestantismus zur Zeit a Lascos", in *Johannes a Lasco (1499–1560): Polnischer baron, Humanist und europäischer Reformator; Beiträge zum internationalen Symposium vom 14.–17. Oktober 1999 in der Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden* , ed. Cristoph Strohm (Tübingen, 1999), 21–34.

[31] Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Proclus as a reader of Plato and Plotinus, and His Influence in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance," in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* 4 (Rome, 1996), 116.

Although the study of Coornhert began with modern foundations in the pioneering work of Bruno Becker (1885–1968), [32] the current generation of researchers has a lively sense of the exceptional nature of Coornhert's thought. He can still be described as "one of the most remarkable men ever to have been born in the Netherlands." [33] In a certain sense this is true, for even considered simply by the size of his literary output Coornhert's legacy was extraordinary. [34] But all the same, in the light of 'Kristeller's Law', we need to reconsider the image of Coornhert as a "visionary thinker" [35] and a man far in advance of his time. [36]

The Coornhert not only of popular imagination but even of the current generation of scholarship is not a child of his time but an almost timeless figure. As such there is no sense of him going through any personal development as a thinker. Bonger was quite explicit in considering it a "difficult challenge" to outline the development of Coornhert's ideas, "since from his youth on there were no changes, but only an elaboration and refining of his basic ideas, 'perfectism' and spiritual freedom." [37] Coornhert's thoughts are presented to the historian as an abstract, unchanging given.

Bonger's methodological idealism is closed to the possibility that both Coornhert and his antagonists, in defending their convictions, made choices that were constrained by the 'requirements of the time' or by the positions taken by the opposing party. In a study of religious disputations, a static view of the mental world of the participants

---

[32] Bruno Becker brought together and published an important collection of source materials on, among other things, the background to Coornhert's perfectism: *Bronnen tot de kennis van het leven en de werken van D. V. Coornhert*, ed. Bruno Becker, RGP, kleine ser., no. 25 (The Hague 1928); Idem, "Coornhert: de 16e eeuwse apostel der volmaakbaarheid," *NAKG* 19 (1926), 59–84.

[33] L. A. Langeraad, "Coornhert," in *BWPG* II, 247; cited in Berkvens-Stevelinck, "Coornhert, een eigenzinnig theoloog", 30. Berkvens-Stevelinck expresses her agreement with this characterization of Coornhert.

[34] "Coornhert était le plus fécond des écrivains néerlandais du seizième siècle." B. Becker, "Sébastien Castellion et Thierry Coornhert," in *Studia bibliographica in honorem Herman de la Fontaine Verwey*, ed. J. van der Woude (Amsterdam, 1966), 11.

[35] Andrew Pettegree, "The Politics of Toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572–1620", in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* , ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge, 1996), 198.

[36] W. Bergsma, "'Godt alleen mach die ziele dooden': Coornhert en de godsdienstpolitiek", in *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert. Dwars maar recht*, 43.

[37] Bonger, *Life and Work*, 121–122. Bonger makes it hard for the reader to distinguish Coornhert's various treatises. His notes refer almost solely to the folio numbers in the *Wercken*. This reinforces the impression that Coornhert's oeuvre is a seamless whole without development.

can only be a barrier to accurate analysis. In a polemical engagement there is, by definition, movement. In Coornhert's case this general observation gains added weight: with the exception of translations from the classics, not a single piece in the considerable oeuvre of this "controversialist"[38] arose outside a polemical context. Coornhert continually formulated his ideas in reaction to the world around him.

Only the German historian Gerhard Güldner has recognized that development can be seen in Coornhert's thought. Coornhert became more intensively concerned with the issue of freedom of conscience after 1579, as a result of the prohibitions enacted against him by the States of Holland. Güldner descries a veritable U-turn in Coornhert's thinking: an Erastian proponent of government intervention in the visible church became a fervent defender of freedom of conscience.[39] Coornhert's famous treatise of 1582, now generally known under the short title *Synodus […] vander conscientien vryheyt* (Synod on the Freedom of Conscience), is seen as the peak of this new direction. The first half of the work's full title, however, points in a quite different direction: *Synodus of weegschaal tusschen d'oude ende niew vereffende kerck* (Synod or balance between the old and the newly settled church). The treatise addressed the question of religious division; the theme of freedom of conscience was subordinate to the main issue.[40] Furthermore, in the *Synod* Coornhert does in fact consider the role of the temporal authorities in the government of the church.

Güldner's position is in line with the widespread view of Coornhert as a 'spiritualist'.[41] Just like the term 'Nicodemite', 'spiritualist' only applies to Coornhert to the extent of his beliefs about individual religious experience and about the 'invisible church' comprising all 'true' believers. As soon as he expresses his views about the commonwealth or about political unity, the 'visible church'—supported by the secular authorities—makes its appearance. Had Coornhert been a spiritualist in this regard, as Franck was, then he would have conformed outwardly to the ruling church. Coornhert's fierce resistance to the Reformed Church arose precisely from his sense of the need for the

[38] Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 372.

[39] Gerhard Güldner, *Das Toleranz-Problem in den Niederlanden im Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Lübeck, 1968), 75.

[40] Compare Martin van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555–1590* (Cambridge, 1992), 245–248.

[41] For a general overview of spiritualism in the sixteenth-century Low Countries see Mout, "Spiritualisten in de Nederlandse reformatie van de zestiende eeuw."

'visible church' to represent the true church, a sense quite incompatible with a purely spiritualist position.

It is generally accepted that Coornhert's 'spiritualism' influenced his ideas about toleration.[42] One of the grounds for freedom of religion that Bonger discerns in his works is the 'spiritualist' one. It can be found, for instance, in the line that faith must be seen as a gift of God.[43] Not only in his doctrine of tolerance, but also in his perfectism and his epistemology, Coornhert showed himself to be a follower of Castellio. As yet this indebtedness has only been investigated in outline.[44] The clear spiritual kinship between the two men has perhaps contributed to the misconception that Coornhert was a principled proponent of religious pluriformity. Castellio attached little importance to the condition of the visible church on earth,[45] but his acquiescence in religious division was exceptional. According to Mario Turchetti, Castellio was "the lone voice proclaiming the true open-minded and definitive tolerance."[46] Coornhert, on the contrary, looked forward to a restoration of ecclesial unity. He defended religious freedom, despite its giving rise to further religious pluriformity, only as a temporary expedient to promote public concord and open up possibilities for debate.

There is a widespread view of Coornhert as a representative of a 'humanist' tradition characterized by modern, bourgeois and above all Dutch values such as tolerance and moderation.[47] This "progressive thinker" has even been seen as a proponent of the separation of church and state.[48] However, the modern concept of freedom of religion, which presupposes religious divisions, cannot be harmonized with Coornhert's views. He refused to accept the splintering of the

---

[42] Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 98; Voogt, *Constraint on trial*, 233.

[43] Bonger, *De motivering van de godsdienstvrijheid* , 107–122. For a short overview of Coornhert's various arguments in favour of liberty of conscience see Bergsma, "Godt alleen mach die ziele dooden," 32–43.

[44] Becker, "Sébastien Castellion et Thierry Coornhert"; Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 270–277.

[45] Guggisberg distinguishes three main themes in Castellio's polemical writings: Bible translation, the killing of heretics, and Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 237.

[46] Mario Turchetti, "Religious Concord and Political Tolerance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century France", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991), 20.

[47] P. Thoenes, "Holland, humanisme en burgercultuur," in *Geschiedenis van het humanisme: Hoofdfiguren uit de humanistische traditie*, ed. P. B. Cliteur and W. van Dooren (Amsterdam, 1991), 280–282.

[48] Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert, *Op zoek naar het hoogste goed* , ed. H. Bonger (Baarn, 1987), 35–36.

unified Church of the Middle Ages. This makes it hard to accept that he followed Castellio and the French *politiques* in seeking a reasoned basis for religious pluriformity.[49] Coornhert accepted the religious divisions around him as a temporary condition, while considering freedom of religion a necessity for the preservation of civil peace and public order. Only if conducted in liberty could the debate about the 'church of God' reach a satisfactory conclusion. Coornhert's defence of this liberty draws support from arguments of principle, but is in fact based on pragmatism.

The issue of "Coornhert and tolerance" constitutes a "question mal posée."[50] This is to do with the terminological mist in which the theme is shrouded. The term 'tolerance' is alien to sixteenth-century sources and the verb '*tolerare*' appears only sporadically. Coornhert spoke of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, of concord and, in even more general terms, of peace and love of neighbour. Turchetti makes a distinction between "tolérance théologique" and "tolérance civile".[51] The latter can be found among thinkers such as François Hotman (1524–1590) and the later Castellio, who had assimilated religious difference as a premise and sought to embed 'tolerance' in the polity. "Tolérance théologique" presupposes flexibility where adiaphora (dogmatic questions not necessary to salvation) are at stake, and is closely related to such terms as *concordia, caritas, pax* and *mansuetudo*.[52] This

[49] I use the term *politiques* with caution, to refer not to a specific group of thinkers but to a particular line of thought that subordinated religious unity to the preservation of peace. See Edmond M. Beame, "The Politiques and the Historians", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993), 355–379.

[50] Following Mario Turchetti, "Une question mal posée: Erasme et la tolérance; L'idée de sygkatabasis", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 53 (1991), 379–395. Erasmus's ideas about tolerance have similarly been read anachronistically. In adopting the phrase "une question mal posée," Turchetti was inspired by L. Febvre, "Une question mal posée: Les origines de la Réforme française et le problème général des causes de la Réforme", *Revue historique* 161 (1929), 1–73.

[51] Turchetti, "Une question mal posée," 381–382. This distinction is a variation on that between 'concorde' and 'tolérance' that Turchetti earlier deployed in a groundbreaking article: "la concorde mise sur l'unité de la foi, la tolérance légitime la rupture de cette unité." Turchetti argued for a reformulation of the whole historiographical debate about early modern thinking on tolerance. Mario Turchetti, "'Concorde ou tolérance?' de 1562 à 1598," *Revue historique* 274 (1985), 342, 355.

[52] H. R. Guggisberg, "The Defense of Religious Toleration and Religious Liberty in Early Modern Europe: Arguments, Pressures and Some Consequences", *History of European Ideas* 4 (1983), 36–37.

was the terminology of irenicists such as Erasmus. [53] They reasoned from the assumption that ultimate Christian unity must somehow be reflected on earth. Ultimate unity also dominated Coornhert's ideas, although in his view it could only be arrived at after passing through the wilderness of religious division.

Hans Guggisberg suggests that the concept of 'tolerance' should primarily be seen as opposition to persecution where dissident figures such as Franck were concerned. [54] This is in large measure true of Coornhert. His works contain no systematic consideration of questions of freedom of religion or freedom of conscience. Coornhert certainly did not proclaim a *doctrine* of tolerance. In not one of his treatises does freedom of religion provide a premise for an argument. The problem at issue was the relationship of the new church to the old, in other words: the problem of religious division.

The same blindness to Coornhert's actual principles can be seen in discussions of his thinking on the issue of human salvation. A single aspect, human perfectibility, has been emphasized out of all proportion to its place within his thought as a whole. Coornhert never systematically developed his thoughts on perfectism. The idea that humans were morally perfectible was part of his general view of sanctification. In his writings on this fundamental theological question, Coornhert sought terminological harmony with his Reformed opponents. [55] The full extent of their agreement or disagreement never became clear in the course of the polemics. These quickly focused on the controversial issue of perfectibility, so that Coornhert's broader theological position has—unjustly—come to be seen as eccentric.

Any historian casting a sober look at Coornhert's standing during the period of the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague can hardly conclude otherwise than that Coornhert lacked the influence to bring about the debates. There is also no obvious reason to conclude that the prince of Orange gave permission for the disputations to be held as a "token of honour" for Coornhert. Coornhert was, after all,

---

[53] G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, "Protestant Irenicism in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in *The End of Strife* , ed. David Loades (Edinburgh, 1984), 82–84.

[54] Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, "Tolerance," in *OER* 4, 160.

[55] D. V. Coornhert, *Tafel vander ghelovigen justificatie ofte rechtvaerdichwordinge in Christo Jesu* (Haarlem, 1582), 2v.

a controversial figure, whose support for the Revolt had been called into question by his fierce condemnations of the Reformed Church as a false church. The Prince's commissioners kept a watchful eye on him after his return to Holland in 1577.[56] Furthermore, the Prince had no taste for theological debates, seeing them as a recipe for disruption. A direct connection between Coornhert's views on tolerance and the disputations in Leiden and The Hague can neither be shown nor plausibly suggested. At best a case can be made for an indirect connection: might the magistrates who gave permission for the debates have shared Coornhert's views? To formulate an answer to this question, a brief excursus will be necessary into "the problem of liberty". Religious toleration must, after all, be closely related to the idea of religious liberty.

The Problem of Liberty

The States of Holland hoped that the religious disputation in The Hague would put a stop to accusations that they were riding roughshod over freedom of conscience. The idea that the States had any intention of "constraining or ruling over any in his mind or conscience" had to be denied all plausibility.[57] At the same time, the States left no doubt that the purpose of the debate was to "stop the mouth" of Coornhert. [58]

The States saw freedom of conscience as somehow implicated in the religious disputation, so much is clear. There could, however, be no question of free debate in The Hague. Freedom of conscience and freedom of speech were by no means the same thing, and the connection between them is not unambiguous. This is not to say that the States were only paying lip service to freedom of conscience. That their policy of freedom of conscience would be confirmed by the disputation in The Hague was, however, incidental to their purpose. The thing above all else at issue in the debate was the legitimization of the Reformed Church as the public church, so that public concord could be given a strong foundation. This was why Coornhert had to be silenced.

---

[56] See p. 87.
[57] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.
[58] Ibidem.

The abovementioned perfectly illustrates why there is now reference to the "problem of liberty." [59] Where once there was a clear vision of the "tempered freedom" of the Republic there is now doubt and confusion. E. H. Kossmann has soberly clarified the complexity of the 'problem'. He discussed the multifaceted nature of freedom in the early modern Low Countries, the pragmatic tendency of all thought about liberty, and the way in which, both then and now, freedom was spoken of as an organic whole that should be considered a leading principle of the Dutch Republic. [60] The heart of Kossmann's argument is double. The overriding significance of a deep-rooted principle of freedom is a national myth. Nevertheless, the notion of liberty was (and is) reified to an extraordinary degree. In brief, liberty was idealized, but as such was always very functional. Kossmann concluded that Dutch history shows "that liberty is an excellent tool to keep a society going". [61]

Kossmann made short work of the liberal conception of history that crystallized in the course of the nineteenth century and which found an important spokesman in the historian H. A. Enno van Gelder, whose work portrays a fundamental opposition between moderate civil regents, who tried to put the ideas of Coornhert (among others) into political practice, and Calvinist dogmatists for whom the power and the authority of the church trumped all other considerations. [62]

According to Kossmann, this traditional view contains a number of provocative incongruities. Is it likely that the regents of Holland opted for the Reformed Church as the church of the nation, while at the same time basing their policies on the ideas of an outspokenly anti-Calvinist author like Coornhert? The authorities failed to implement 'intolerant' measures (including censorship decrees), but does

---

[59] Kossmann, "Freedom", was translated and adapted in Dutch as "Het probleem van de vrijheid in de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse Republiek," in *Vergankelijkheid en continuïteit: Opstellen over geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 1995), 63–86.

[60] Compare W. R. E. Velema, "Het Nederlandse vrijheidsbegrip. Ter inleiding", in *Vrijheid: Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende tot de twintigste eeuw*, ed. E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier, Reeks Nederlandse begripsgeschiedenis 2 (Amsterdam, 1999), 5–6; Martin van Gelderen, "De Nederlandse Opstand (1555–1610): van 'vrijheden' naar 'oude vrijheid' en de 'vrijheid der conscientien'," in *Vrijheid*, ed. Haitsma Mulier, 35–36, 39–42.

[61] Kossmann, "Freedom," 298.

[62] H. A. Enno van Gelder, *Vrijheid en onvrijheid in de Republiek: Geschiedenis der vrijheid van drukpers en godsdienst van 1572 tot 1789* (Haarlem, 1947); Idem, *Getemperde vrijheid: Een verhandeling over de verhouding van kerk en staat in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en de vrijheid van meningsuiting in zake godsdienst, drukpers en onderwijs gedurende de 17e eeuw* (Groningen, 1972).

it make sense to take liberty as the explanatory factor? Is it, after all, logical to suppose that the magistrates, often learned jurists with an aversion to civil disobedience, instituted measures against figures such as Coornhert at the insistence of Reformed ministers, but without the intention of seeing them obeyed?

Giving a negative answer to each of these questions, as Kossmann does, leaves one with a sense that it is high time to speak of 'the end of toleration'. And indeed, Jonathan Israel characterizes the political and religious developments in Holland after 1572 as a "rejection of toleration".[63] The problem of liberty can, therefore, be reduced to the simple observation that there was no liberty. Let the historian be warned by Kossmann: when tolerance or liberty is identified as a collection of principles that shaped public life, the historian becomes entangled in his or her own argument. This is not to say that historical investigation of early modern thinking about toleration can be abandoned. In fact, it has taken a number of new routes.

Judith Pollmann introduces a distinction between the private and the public sphere. While representatives of different confessions fought one another with fire and sword in public life, close personal friendships could develop between believers of different persuasions.[64] Magistrates' declarations of attachment to the public church in no way provide clues to their own inner lives.[65] Collective wellbeing, served by a strong public church, and the individual path to salvation, presupposing an interiorized feeling faith, made quite different religious demands.[66] The extent of the tolerance shown to those of other denominations depends partly on the perspective taken.

Historical research has seen the most radical change at a European level. In the introduction to the collection *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*,[67] the historian Ole Grell states that religious toleration was, in the Reformation period, not in the first instance a question of individuals. A *right* to individual judgement in religious questions only made its appearance in the nineteenth century. Historians should focus on thinking about community and the

---

[63] Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 372.
[64] Pollmann, *Religious Choice*, 200.
[65] Van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen*, 14.
[66] Pollmann, *Religious Choice*, 7–12.
[67] Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner ed., *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996).

protection of the common good, and examine the question of authority cast up by the Reformation. Obedience to various ecclesial and secular authorities was no longer self-evident. The reactions of church and government to this fundamental change touch the heart of the early modern significance of freedom and (in)tolerance.[68]

Heiko A. Oberman points out that research into early modern thinking about toleration is still limited almost entirely to the field of intellectual history.[69] The important question, however, he sees as social and political: how did Europeans think the centrifugal forces unleashed by the Reformation could be contained? However intellectual it may have been—and Oberman still sees an important role for the history of ideas—the sixteenth-century debate about toleration was a purposeful and fairly prosaic attempt to put a stop to chaos and the threat of chaos.[70] The question of whether such attempts really deserve to be called a struggle for tolerance becomes inescapable.

There is still lively historical debate about the nature and extent of religious toleration in the Dutch Republic. Two collections of essays, published in 1997 and 2002 respectively, reflect the current state of the question. In *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*,[71] a collection of conference proceedings, there is plenty of space to historicize,[72] put in perspective[73] and nuance[74] the notion of tolerance in the early modern Low Countries. Elisabeth Labrousse's introduction makes clear that the debate about religious toleration in the early modern period is still largely the history of the idea of 'tolerance' and is not short of triumphalism.[75]

---

[68] Ole Peter Grell, "Introduction," 12.

[69] Heiko A. Oberman, "The Travail of Tolerance: Containing Chaos in Early Modern Europe", in *Tolerance and Intolerance*, ed. Grell and Scribner, 13–14.

[70] Oberman, "The Travail of Tolerance", 29–31.

[71] C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes ed., *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 76 (Leiden, 1997).

[72] Jonathan Israel, "The Intellectual Debate about Toleration in the Dutch Republic," in *The Emergence of Tolerance*, ed. Berkvens-Stevelinck et al., 3–36.

[73] M. E. H. N. Mout, "Limits and Debates: a Comparative View of Dutch Toleration in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century", in *The Emergence of Tolerance*, ed. Berkvens-Stevelinck et al., 37–47.

[74] Hans Posthumus Meyjes, "Tolérance et irénisme," in *The Emergence of Tolerance*, ed. Berkvens-Stevelinck et al., 63–73.

[75] "C'est la gloire des premières sociétés démocratiques d'avoir [. . .] toléré, accepté les non-conformistes et les dissonances." Elisabeth Labrousse, "Adresse du colloque," in *The Emergence of Tolerance*, ed. Berkvens-Stevelinck et al., 2.

Furthermore, there is still a hang-over from the liberal conception of history, in which the Dutch principle of liberty is an essential feature of the history of the Netherlands. The determinism of by-gone times does seem to have vanished, but James Tracy still perceives a specifically Dutch tradition that made it easier to accept religious difference.[76] He cautiously suggests that while attitudes to religious persecution cannot in general be labelled as 'Erasmian', Erasmus himself should in some sense be regarded as typically 'Dutch' (in the early modern sense of the word).[77]

The supposed exceptionalism of the Dutch Republic underlies the second collection of articles, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*.[78] At first sight the approach seems old-fashioned. The hegemony of an 'intolerant Calvinist church' and the practice of religious plurality are extremes placed side by side. Ronnie Hsia, however, writes of a *paradox*, which is solved by the pragmatic toleration of an essentially intolerant church. Hsia and his contributors see an opportunity to circumvent the problem of liberty, as outlined above, by opting for a pragmatic approach to the question of toleration. The social and political context of religious plurality are given full attention in this volume.[79]

Nevertheless, the central question ("How does one explain the juxtaposition of Calvinist hegemony and religious toleration?") remains unsatisfying.[80] First of all, this question underlines that, all pragmatism aside, something exceptional, perhaps even admirable, was going on in the Dutch Republic.[81] Secondly, the question as it stands is somewhat gratuitous and can easily be answered by pointing out the minority position of the Reformed Church and the condition of religious

---

[76] Tracy, "Erasmus, Coornhert and the Acceptance of Religious Disunity", 49–62.

[77] Ibidem, 62. Compare M. E. H. N. Mout, "Erasmianism in Modern Dutch Historiography", in *Erasmianism: Idea and Reality*, ed. M. E. H. N. Mout, H. Smolinsky and J. Trapman, KNAW Verhandelingen, afd. Letterkunde, new ser., no. 174 (Amsterdam, 1997), 189–198.

[78] R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop, ed., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2002).

[79] Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, introduction to *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*, ed. Hsia and Van Nierop, 1–7.

[80] Ibidem, 2–3.

[81] Hsia closes his introduction with the sentence: "By delineating the structures of toleration and by probing its limits, we can come to appreciate even more the achievements of a pragmatic and unsystematic arrangement that gave lustre to the Dutch Golden Age." Ibidem, 7.

division which made 'toleration' a practical necessity. But if religious toleration is reduced entirely to a matter of political necessity, the mental world of the sixteenth century remains closed to the historian. After all, the diffuse concept of 'toleration' also covers a number of theological notions. The religious view of the Calvinists with regard to differences of belief, and more generally the religious background to the issue of toleration, remain unmentioned.

In a perceptive contribution to the collection just mentioned, Benjamin Kaplan advises a moratorium on the debate about the extent of toleration in the Dutch Republic. [82] The answers to the question in each case seem to be highly dependent on the definition of the concept of 'toleration'. Such terminological confusion makes for an unbalanced exchange of views. Kaplan takes the position that for the present a descriptive approach is to be preferred. He makes a case for first mapping the "social and cultural dimensions" of religious pluriformity. [83] In his latest work on religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe, Kaplan heeds his own call by sumptuously illustrating his basic premise that toleration was "not just a concept or policy but a form of behaviour". [84]

In the historiographical review just provided, only the approaches of Grell and Oberman provide interesting bases from which to explore the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague. The debates turn out to be inseparably tied to issues of authority and order. The historiographical debate about the Dutch Republic, in which the dichotomy between an 'intolerant' church and a 'tolerant' society persists more or less disguisedly amid terminological confusion, is a dead end.

The problem of liberty, as formulated by Kossmann, shows the shortcoming of any view based on an independent concept of liberty. With regard to the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague, the problem translates into the question of how room could be made for debate in a period in which freedom of speech, at least for figures such as Coornhert, was drastically limited. This apparent contradiction disappears by ceasing to regard the debates as a question of toleration. The debates only ever came to be categorized in such a fashion due

---

[82] Benjamin J. Kaplan, "'Dutch' Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision" in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*, ed. Hsia and Van Nierop, 8–26.

[83] Kaplan, "'Dutch' Religious Tolerance," 25–26.

[84] Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge MA, 2007), 8.

to the particularity of Dutch historiography. Once the debates are put into a European context, they begin to look very different. Elsewhere, religious disputations are generally studied as part of the age-old tradition of *disputatio*, which in the sixteenth century was given a new face.

Reformation and Disputation

The reformation of church and society in the sixteenth century brought divisions where it had aimed at unity. It is in the light of this paradox that we should regard the countless religious disputations that took place throughout Europe in this period. A retrospective assessment can only conclude that these debates often entrenched religious divisions. Nevertheless, the most important aim of the participants was to settle the conflict of arguments by refuting the arguments of the other party. This goal is closely related to the origins of the debates. Although religious disputations took many different forms during the reformation, they all ultimately derived from the same original model: medieval academic debate. This formalized debate, tied to strict rules, was part of the general curriculum at European universities from the twelfth century onwards.[85]

In the *disputationes* that play such an important role in medieval academic life, arguments presented for and against a particular view finally came together to establish a single truth. Each debate eventually led to a solution to the academic 'conflict'. Disputation served truth. "Thus have disputations done good in improving doctrine", was also Coornhert's opinion.[86] There was, moreover, no question of an attempt to find a compromise: 'true' and 'untrue' were mutually exclusive categories which allowed of no middle way. Nor could a particular outcome be enforced. Truth was only served by a reasoned solution to the debate, with the validity of the arguments presented being the deciding factor. In the course of the debate counter-arguments were refuted or ironed out so that everybody could see clearly the way in which the conclusion of the debate, that is to say, the truth, had been

---

[85] Hilde de Ridder-Symoens ed., *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 2, *Universities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1996), 345; Leiden University fitted the general pattern: Willem Otterspeer, *Groepsportret met dame*, vol. 1, *Het bolwerk van de vrijheid: De Leidse universiteit, 1575–1672* (Amsterdam 2000) 236–238; Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch*, 8–13.

[86] D. V. Coornhert, *Brieven-boeck*, letter 74 in *Wercken* III, 130v.

reached.[87] At the basis of this procedure lay the conviction that there could be no contradictions within Christian doctrine. Only a perfect harmony could be considered *testimonium veritatis*.[88]

The German historians Marion Hollerbach and Thomas Fuchs agree that the academic *disputatio* provided the basic format for sixteenth-century religious disputation, but they question the idea that the participants necessarily came to such a debate with the intention of solving theological conflict. Hollerbach outlines the development of religious disputation, which in her view reached its full maturity as an instrument of policy during the series of colloquies instigated by the emperor, Charles V. These debates in the 1530s and 1540s were part of Charles's attempt to restore religious unity. After the Peace of Augsburg (1555), however, there was no longer the same pressing need to bring the different parties to an agreement (*Ausgleich*). Religious disputations now overwhelmingly came to serve the struggle between tendencies within the different confessions (*Auseinandersetzung*), partly as a result of confessionalization.[89] Fuchs takes a more extreme position. In his view it would have been out of the question that an academic disputation might be intended to bring people together, as the only effect this form of dialogue could have would be to drive the parties further apart.[90] When theologians were really seeking mutual understanding, Fuchs argues, they sought a different format of discussion, based on the medieval church assembly: a synod or council. [91]

Both Hollerbach and Fuchs take insufficient account of the structure of an academic disputation, which *by its very nature* led to a *determinatio*, in which the chair provided a solution to the debate. It is true that one of the parties was considered to be the winner, but that in no way detracts from the fact that the other party's arguments also

---

[87] Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg, "Medieval Philosophical Literature", in *CHLMP*, 21–22, 27–29.

[88] Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* , CCSL 1:21, cited in G. R. Evans, *Getting It Wrong: The Medieval Epistemology of Error*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 63 (Leiden, 1998), 102.

[89] Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch*, 259. On the process of confessionalization, see Heinz Schilling, "Confessional Europe," in *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600*, vol. 2, *Visons, Programs, and Outcomes* , ed. Thomas A. Brady jr., Heiko A. Oberman and James D. Tracy (Leiden, 1995), 641–681.

[90] Thomas Fuchs uses the expression "strukturelle Unfähigkeit zum Kompromiss." He considers the format of academic disputation incompatible with any seeking for compromise or solutions to theological differences. Fuchs, *Konfession und Gespräch*, 500.

[91] Ibidem, 1.

had to be harmonized in the final judgement. The arguments against could by no means simply be set aside. [92] Furthermore, Hollerbach's strict distinction between *Ausgleich* and *Auseinandersetzung* is artificial. The passion with which sixteenth-century theologians expressed their opposing views does nothing to negate their desire for a return to religious unity.

Roughly speaking, two formal types of medieval *disputatio* can be distinguished. Debates could be conducted on the basis of a *quaestio* (or a series of *quaestiones*) or on the basis of one or more *theses*. This formal difference was related to the purpose of the disputation.

A *quaestio* was an 'open question' that could be viewed from two sides. The *magister* presiding over the disputation expounded the *quaestio* and took a position. It was then the turn of a student to defend this position against *oppositiones* from the audience. To conclude the debate the *magister* summarized all the arguments *pro* and *contra* and delivered his *determinatio*. In summing up he presented the solution of the question at issue and showed that all the counter-arguments had been refuted. This process was characteristic of disputations in the theological faculties around 1250. In other faculties this basic structure could be varied. It might, for instance, be the custom that the student himself had to choose the position, and the *magister*, in the capacity of *opponens*, argued against it. [93]

In the late Middle Ages the emphasis shifted from the *quaestio* to the *thesis* (also called the *propositio*). The oppositional nature of the disputation was retained, but the goal of the debate changed. A *thesis*, unlike a *quaestio*, made a truth claim in advance, a claim which was settled at the end of the disputation. The disputants no longer discussed an 'open question', but took sides over a position that was deprived of openness and was presented as 'the truth'. [94]

Gradually, after 1500, the manner of disputing also changed, with connections being sought to the medieval *ars obligatoria*.[95] In this format, the *respondens* undertook to maintain a *thesis*; the *opponens* asked him

---

[92] L. M. de Rijk, *Middeleeuwse wijsbegeerte: Traditie en vernieuwing* (Assen and Amsterdam, 1977), 129.

[93] Kenny and Pinborg, "Medieval Philosophical Literature," in *CHLMP*, 21–22.

[94] G. R. Evans , *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge, 1992), 102.

[95] Kenny and Pinborg, "Medieval Philosophical Literature," in *CHLMP*, 26–27; Eleonore Stump and Paul Vincent Spade, "Obligations", in *CHLMP*, 315–341.

to agree to a subsequent proposition, with the purpose of leading the *respondens* into self-contradiction.[96] The *respondens* could agree to the proposition (*concedo*) or reject it (*nego*). He could also agree but with reservations (*distinguo*). If he became entangled in self-contradiction, the opponent had won the disputation. Argumentation by *distinguo* typified religious disputations during the Reformation. The debates often focused on a semantic analysis of concepts that had some degree of ambivalence. The formal structure of argumentation was no longer central, as in disputations over a *quaestio*. Instead, lexical dissection had become predominant.

Both types of debate survived side by side well into the eighteenth century. The Leiden disputation showed the greatest similarity to a *quaestio*-based disputation, in this case one based on a series of *quaestiones*. Minister Cornelisz tried to assume the position of *magister*. In the Hague disputation, in contrast, one of Coornhert's treatises was taken as *thesis* and a number of arguments by *distinguo* were of central importance. Lack of clarity as to who was *respondens* and who *opponens*—roles that gave shape and direction to such debates—meant that this particular disputation was conducted in an atmosphere of confusion and irritation.

Few will now be surprised to hear that the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague were conducted according to supposedly 'medieval' scholastic principles. After all, it means only that they followed the formal method of disputation then current. The deployment of syllogistic chains of reasoning, in both Leiden and The Hague, was also to be expected.[97] These were among the standard tools of every trained theologian. Their use, in the sixteenth century and later, was taken to be self-evident.[98]

It would therefore be wrong to regard the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague as harbingers of what has come to be called the 'Reformed scholasticism' of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This involved a far-reaching systematization of Reformed doctrine, with pride of place given to the doctrine of predestination.[99]

---

[96] I. Angelelli, "The Techniques of Disputation in the History of Logic," *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970), 800–815.

[97] Alexander Broadie, *Introduction to Medieval Logic* (Oxford, 1987), 171–190.

[98] Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 88.

[99] J. S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop, 1975), 119–136; A. E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford, 1990), 208–218.

The development of such a Reformed dogmatics is no longer regarded as a break with the Reformation. Rather, there was a theological continuity from medieval scholasticism, through the Reformation, to the development of a Protestant orthodoxy characterized by scholastic rationality.[100] By emphasizing those formal aspects of the works of a theologian such as Calvin that were characteristic for the intellectual climate in which he worked, the historian Richard A. Muller deprives the Reformation of too modern an appearance. [101]

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that the sixteenth century brought changes, with regard to disputation as to so much else. Scholars such as Rudolf Agricola (1444–1485) contributed to an important fifteenth-century 'rhetorization' of dialectics as an academic discipline. [102] That is to say, formal argumentation came to be subordinate to the art of convincing one's hearers. Truth should not only be tested and demonstrated, but especially made appealing. Marijke Spies considers Coornhert an important representative of this rhetorical renewal in the Low Countries.[103] Like Agricola, he was in favour of lining up arguments *pro* and *contra*.[104] This method of presenting the arguments on both sides of the question had, indeed, formed the basis of scholastic disputation, but in the course of the sixteenth century dialecticians distanced themselves from the commonplaces that (in the form of premises) dominated medieval debate. "The proposition has become an opinion, to set against other opinions", says Spies. [105] Coornhert, too, presented his readers with a series of arguments *pro* and *contra*, so that they could teach themselves how to consider a question (naturally he always provided pointers to help his readers reach the right conclusion). The application of this "Ciceronian, argumentational

[100] McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, 69–121; Willem J. van Asselt, "Protestant Scholasticism: Some Methodological Considerations in the Study of its Development," *NAKG* 81 (2001), 266–267.

[101] Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, 2000).

[102] Lisa Jardine, "Humanistic Logic", in *CHRP*, 173–176.

[103] M. Spies, "Rhetorica: strategie", in M. Spies and K. Meerhoff, *Rhetorica: strategie en creativiteit* (Amsterdam, 1993), 11.

[104] M. Spies, "Rhetoric and Civic Harmony in the Dutch Republic of the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century", in *Rhetorica Movet: Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honour of Heinrich F. Plett*, ed. Peter L. Oesterreich and Thomas O. Sloane (Leiden, 1999), 60.

[105] Spies, "Rhetorica: strategie," 9–10.

rhetoric"—as distinguished by Spies—has so far been studied in relation to Coornhert's work only on the basis of his plays. [106]

In general, rhetoric in sixteenth-century Northern Europe focused on declamation. The aim was that the reader or listener should be moved (the technical term for which was *movere*) so that he or she would concur with the case being made.[107] Where this 'moving' related to matters of faith, the theologian-preacher—the 'translator' of the Word of God—had to master the techniques of rhetoric. [108] The relationship between rhetoric and theology in this period was complex and wide-ranging.[109] The most important change brought about by the Reformation was the involvement of secular authorities in theological debate. Disputations exchanged an academic for a political setting, and furthermore took place in public. In other words: theological debates became religious disputations.

Hollerbach is so far the only historian to have ventured to produce a general overview. In studying religious disputations in sixteenth-century Germany she distinguished three types, the civic, the imperial, and the princely.[110] These types can be put in a broadly chronological sequence.[111]

In the early Reformation a series of civic disputations about religion took place, primarily in Switzerland and Germany. This series began with disputations in Hamburg (1522) and Zürich (1523). The Hamburg disputation took place within the walls of the 'old' church, where an informal hearing of a dissident monk led to a heated debate. Hollerbach characterizes this religious disputation as preparatory to an official trial for heresy. The debate in Zürich was between represen-

---

[106] A. C. G. Fleurkens, *Stichtelijke lust: De toneelspelen van D. V. Coornhert (1522–1590) als middelen tot het geven van morele instructie* (Hilversum, 1994).

[107] Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1988), 281–285.

[108] John Bossy speaks of the sixteenth-century "erection of classically inspired eloquence as a model for communication between God and man." Ministers of the Word had the job of communicating God's eloquence through preaching "the living Word" to the congregation. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), 98.

[109] For an exhaustive overview of developments in the first half of the sixteenth century, see Olivier Millet, "La Réforme protestante et la rhétorique (circa 1520–1550)," in *Histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne, 1450–1950* , ed. Marc Fumaroli (Paris, 1999), 259–312.

[110] Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch*, 1–2.

[111] For a clear summary, see Dingel, "Religionsgespräche IV", 656–657.

tatives of the Catholic Church and a number of Evangelical preachers, foremost among them Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531). This reformer can be regarded as the spiritual father of the type of civic disputation that accompanied and at the same time legitimized a city's change of religion.[112]

The debate in Zürich was a religious disputation by the general definition: the secular authorities, in this case the civic government, presided over the theological debate. The magistrates were the final authority in the disputation, which took place as part of an extraordinary session of the council. Religious disunity was threatening civic order; furthermore the magistrates had the duty to maintain the preaching of the true faith. The magistrates expressly refrained from giving judgement on the controversy itself. The Bible was appointed the only authority in matters of faith; the secular authorities simply reserved the right to ensure that only reliable and capable interpreters were appointed to the city's churches.[113]

Hollerbach regards the religious disputation in Zürich as combining elements of a theological debate (disputation), a (heresy) trial—Zwingli was reputed a heretic—and a police action for the maintenance of public order.[114] The historian Bernd Moeller even regards religious disputations of this kind as Zwingli's invention, and labels them 'political disputations'. In his eyes they were a novelty.

Moeller distinguishes three main characteristics of 'political disputations'. Firstly, the form of the disputation was modelled on the academic debate, but this formal instrument for establishing truth was now being used to decide the struggle for urban reformation in favour of the Protestants. A disputation forced and legitimized a decision, while the Protestants could rely on the support of the magistrates in advance. Secondly, a political authority, generally the city council, presided over the debate. Thirdly, the Bible was the authority appealed to during the discussions. Moeller indicates that civic disputations expressed a certain sense of community, in particular a concern for the common good. The disputation also often provided juridical grounds for the religious transformation of the city; the so-called *ius reformandi* could be determined by a disputation, which contributed greatly to the

[112] Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch*, 32–44.
[113] Ibidem, 44–45.
[114] Ibidem, 46.

popularity of this type of disputation among Protestant theologians. [115] According to Oberman, the religious disputation in Zürich continued to provide the blueprint. [116]

It will have been the hybrid nature of the civic religious disputation that inspired Hollerbach to proclaim that the religious disputation in general only found its "spezifische Ausprägung" as part of an imperial diet.[117] Naturally, these debates, referred to as colloquys, between representatives of the 'old' and the 'new' faiths were not without political significance, but the outcome of the discussions was not fixed in advance, or only very barely. The goal of these encounters was to reach an agreement between the parties, so that the religious unity of the Holy Roman Empire could be restored. [118]

The Diet of Augsburg in 1530 was already the occasion for an unofficial religious disputation between proponents and opponents of the Confession of Augsburg (1530), but only with the religious disputations in Hagenau (1540), Worms (1540) and Regensburg (1541) were there representative examples of religious disputations of the 'imperial' type.[119] Papal legates, princes, highly placed noblemen and famous theologians of Lutheran, Reformed or Catholic allegiance were present at the discussions. The colloquy in Hagenau, however, broke down during the preliminary discussions, while the meeting in Worms got off to a very difficult start. The parties again differed concerning the formal structure of the debate. In Regensburg, finally, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope for success. Partly thanks to the efforts of Cardinal Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542) the parties came to a *temporary* agreement concerning the formulation of the crucial article of justification in the so-called Regensburg Book. With regard to the

---

[115] Moeller, "Zu den städtischen Disputationen," 179.

[116] Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Werden und Wertung der Reformation* (Tübingen, 1977), 241–255; McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins*, 43–44.

[117] Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch*, 259.

[118] Ibidem, 108–184. See too Vincent Pfnür, "Die Einigung bei den Religionsgesprächen von Worms und Regensburg 1540/ 41 eine Täuschung?", in *Die Religionsgespräche der Reformationszeit*, ed. Gerhard Müller, Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 19 (Gütersloh, 1980), 55–88.

[119] The religious discussions at Augsburg were not among the official acts of the diet. Herbert Immenkötter, "Reichstag und Konzil. Zur Deutung der Religionsgespräche der Augsburger Reichstag 1530", in *Die Religionsgespräche*, ed. Müller, 9. The course of events at the other diets is set out clearly in C. Augustijn, *De godsdienstgesprekken tussen rooms-katholieken en protestanten van 1538 tot 1541* , Verhandelingen rakende den natuurlijken en geopenbaarden godsdienst uitgegeven door Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap, new ser., no. 30 (Haarlem, 1967).

administration of the Eucharist and the authority of the Church, however, the differences remained.[120] This conference too ended in disappointment for all concerned.

The famous Colloquy of Poissy (1561), organized at the behest of the French queen mother Catharine de Medici (1519–1589), followed the format of the religious disputations in the imperial cities. The Catholic organizers had a domestic goal, namely reconciliation with the Huguenots, though their ambitious reached even further. The conference was also attended by foreign theologians such as Theodore Beza (1516–1605) and Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562). A number of German princes also sent representatives. This religious disputation was a European event, expectations of which were pitched high: truth would triumph and the unity of Christendom would be restored. [121] During the discussions concerning the Eucharistic formula the dividing line between Catholics and Reformed quickly became very apparent; furthermore, the superior general of the Society of Jesus questioned the propriety of the king of France presiding over the colloquy. As a temporal ruler he was not competent to decide spiritual questions. In brief, this colloquy too ended in painful failure, and was the prelude to a new war of religion. [122]

In the German lands the Peace of Augsburg (1555) had in the meantime reduced the urgency of restoring the religious unity of the empire as a whole. From then onwards religious disputations were primarily organized at the level of the various different German principalities. The participants in these debates represented various religious tendencies within Protestantism, which was in danger of ever further fragmentation. Hollerbach states that in this period the procedures of disputation were further refined: around the turn of the century they reached their "subtilste Zuspitzung." [123]

An example of this third type of religious conference is that held in Frankenthal in 1571, one to which Coornhert referred several times. This was a religious disputation between Reformed and Baptist preachers, presided over by Palatine Elector Frederick III (Frederick the

---

[120] Peter Matheson, *Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg* (Oxford, 1972).

[121] Alain Dufour, "Das Religionsgespräch von Poissy: Hoffnungen der Reformierten und der 'Moyenneurs'," in *Die Religionsgespräche*, ed. Müller, 117–119.

[122] Dingel, "Religionsgespräche IV", 662–663; Donald Nugent, "Colloquy of Poissy", in *OER* 3:281–282.

[123] Hollerbach, *Das Religionsgespräch*, 229.

Wise). It was impossible to get the Baptists—with one exception—to give assent to a number of articles of faith that were supposed to form the basis for a restoration of Christian unity. [124] Nevertheless, the Reformed, who enjoyed the elector's support, declared themselves the victors. This might be what led the States of Friesland to give their consent to a similar debate in Leeuwarden in 1596, in which the Reformed minister Ruardus Acronius disputed with the Baptist preacher Pieter van Ceulen.[125]

Those presiding over the Frisian debate, including two commissioners of the States, expressly referred to the Frankenthal conference and expressed the wish to bring an end to the religious quarrels that were sowing confusion. Many believers were turning away from the churches in despair, only to fall into an "evil and wicked life." The official preface to the discussions characterized the "great rupture in Christendom" as unnatural. The basis on which to restore Christian unity lay in doctrine, "noting that in Christianity it is beyond doubt, that there is no more than one Christ and one Christian doctrine."[126] Just like the proceedings of the religious disputation in Frankenthal, the proceedings of the Frisian debate appeared in print. The historian S. Zijlstra describes these protocols as an "indictment of the anabaptists", underlining the partiality of the chair. [127]

There is debate among German historians as to the most fruitful approach to the study of religious disputations. In 1980 Gerhard Müller chose to close a collection of conference papers on the theme of religious disputations in the Reformation with a *Diskussionsbericht*. This indicates that the methodological controversy of the time was primarily about the relative weighting of political and theological factors.[128] Did political pragmatism or religious idealism inspire the debates

---

[124] The proceedings of this disputation appeared in print as *Protocol, dat is: alle handelinge der t'samensprekinghe tot Franckenthal [. . .] gehouden metten genen diemen wederdoopers noemet* (translated from the German; n.p., 1571).

[125] S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden: Geschiedenis van de doopersen in de Nederlanden 1531–1675* (Hilversum, 2000) 367–369. On Acronius, see *BWPGN* I, 29–38 and *Lexicon* II, 15–18.

[126] *Protocol dat is, de gantsche handelinge des ghesprecx ghehouden tot Leeuwarden in Vrieslandt, tusschen Ruardum Acronium dienaer des Godlijcken woords ter eenre, ende Peeter van Ceulen dienaer bij de mennisten ofte wederdooperen ter ander sijden* (Franeker, 1597), 1–3.

[127] Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente*, 369.

[128] Müller ed., *Die Religionsgespräche der Reformationszeit*, 153–157.

and determine their course—and their ultimate failure? Since then the debate has shifted to the format of religious disputation, with the intertwining of political and religious interests taken as axiomatic.

In 1999 Moeller expressed criticism of the work of his colleague Otto Scheib, who explained the formal structure of religious disputations largely on the basis of the legal procedures (*Rechtsstrukturen*) of the day.[129] Although Moeller's account of Scheib's work is fairly one-sided, he was right in stating that according to Scheib theological debate was not an end in itself but provided the evidence for a "*Mandatsprozess*" to legitimize the (judicial) power of the authorities.[130] This made the disputations in the first instance instruments for the preservation of public peace and order. Moeller admitted that the magistrates of the time sought to remain within the law, but insisted upon the exceptional nature of the disputations as a product of theological, political, social and legal outlooks.[131] With regard to the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague, it can be seen that the States were afraid of novelties. The debates took place as sessions of ad hoc committees of the States, so that existing governmental structures were untouched. Given the unusual character of these committees it remains the case—and in this Moeller can be seen to have been right—that this was a phenomenon never before seen in Holland.

Moeller has also criticized the work of Hollerbach and Fuchs as presenting the Reformation as a continual series of disputations. With a flourish of the pen, the religious conflicts of this period came under the label *Gesprächskonflikt*. In Moeller's view, Hollerbach and Fuchs fail to consider the specific historical context and the precise goals of individual disputations.[132] Moeller saw his "political disputations" subsumed into a larger whole. And it is indeed the case that his younger colleagues are more interested in the way in which the religious disputations of the Reformation period can be characterized in a more general sense. Hollerbach points to the "prototypical"

---

[129] Otto Scheib, *Die Reformationsdiskussionen in der Hansestadt Hamburg, 1522–1528: Zur Struktur und Problematik der Religionsgespräche*, Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte 112 (Münster, 1976) foreword.

[130] Moeller, "Zu den städtischen Disputationen," 189–190. Further see *Die Reformationsdiskussionen in der Hansestadt Hamburg 1522–1528* , 97–105.

[131] Moeller, "Zu den städtischen Disputationen," 189–190.

[132] Ibidem, 189. Moeller has described Zwingli's disputations in a double article: Berndt Moeller, "Zwinglis Disputationen", *Zeitschrift der Savigny Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 87 (1970), 275–324; 91 (1974), 213–364.

academic disputation and describes how this formalized theological debate developed into the religious disputation, distinguishing three types. This is done without an analysis of the content of the individual debates. Fuchs approaches the issue in the most systematic fashion to arrive at a typology of the phenomenon of the *Religionsgespräch*, distinguishing an academic and a synodal tradition. The latter developed from the medieval conciliar movement and was directed to arriving at a theological compromise.[133]

Moeller's method, which involves describing each debate as a unique case, is the most appropriate to the debates in Holland. It is nevertheless important to keep the typological project of Hollerbach and Fuchs in mind. Moeller tends to interpret the disputations almost exclusively as instruments of power. This contains a danger that the outcome of the discussions is presented solely as the victory of the stronger party, imposing its positions by the mailed arm of the authorities. The historian thereby misses the most essential thing about the religious disputations, which is the desire to find a *solution* to a theological conflict. The final judgement confirmed the position of one of the parties and discounted all possible criticism. 'Political' disputations were derived from an academic tradition in which the *determinatio* put an end to all disagreement. The outcome of 'political' disputations may have been fixed from the start, but this outcome could only be legitimized by powerful arguments.[134]

The need to legitimize the Reformed Church as the public church gave direction to both the disputations, that in Leiden and that in The Hague. The debate in Leiden entirely fits Moeller's definition of a 'political disputation'. The ministers' aim was to win the day by refuting Coornhert's criticism. For the religious disputation in The Hague, the label 'political disputation' fits less well. Initially the set-up was to be same as in Leiden, but plans were changed at the last minute. In The Hague the ministers did not act out their opposition to Coornhert, but tried to have it taken away. In other words, they were seeking to con-

---

[133] Fuchs, *Konfession und Gespräch*, 223–246.

[134] Irena Backus provides an admirable analysis of the religious disputations in Baden (1526) and Berne (1528), concentrating on the theological background to the debates and the form of argumentation adopted. Her study makes clear that an analysis of content is essential to an accurate understanding of the theological and the political significance of the debates. Irena Backus, *The Disputations of Baden, 1526 and Berne, 1528: Neutralizing the Early Church*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History 1:1 (1993).

ciliate Coornhert. The disputation in The Hague can be seen to stand in a different tradition from that in Leiden, the tradition of religious disputations which attempted—under the aegis of secular authority—to bring the parties closer together by means of a colloquy. However, it is important to add that there was no question of equality between the participants in the debate in The Hague. With the support of the States, the ministers intended to exact a settlement.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COORNHERT AFFAIR (I): FROM CORRESPONDENCE TO DISPUTATION

Thomas Tilius

Thomas Tilius, in Haarlem early in 1577, was exactly the right man in the right place.[1] Minister in Delft, former abbot of the Abbey of St Bernard near Antwerp, he had taken the side of the Reformed a decade earlier, and his background seemed to make him just the man to build up the Reformed Church in a bulwark of Catholicism like Haarlem. It was a difficult job and William of Orange had assigned it to a heavyweight among the Reformed ministers of Holland.

Haarlem had subscribed to the Pacification of Ghent by ratifying the Treaty of Satisfaction between the city and the Prince of Orange on 1 March 1577. Of more immediate significance was the fact that the city was now represented in the States of Holland and had been forced out of years of isolation as a royalist enclave.[2] The Treaty of Satisfaction specified that the large Catholic majority in Haarlem retained the right to public worship. By order of Prince of Orange and the States of Holland one church was to be cleared for Reformed worship. The *Bakenesserkerk* was assigned to Tilius as his base of operations in Haarlem. The people of the city had only reluctantly complied with this development, as part of the process of adjusting to the recent transition to the Pacification and *de facto* incorporation into the rebel provinces of Holland and Zeeland. The Prince's will was to be obeyed, but that did not mean that Tilius and his entourage could expect a warm reception.

The tense relations within Haarlem have been described by Joke Spaans as an "armed" religious peace settlement.[3] Strictly speaking this is appropriate, as the Catholics and the Reformed in the city were

---

[1] *NNBW* II, 1433–1436; *Biografisch lexicon* V, 502–503.

[2] On this "surrender by Satisfaction" see Spaans, *Haarlem na de reformatie*, 49–52.

[3] Ibidem, 49.

given equal rights. Generally speaking, however, religious peace settlements were a way of confirming a *status quo* and maintaining religious divisions.[4] This was not the case in Haarlem, where the numbers of the Reformed were negligible before the transfer of allegiance. The opening of one church for Reformed worship was intended as a counterweight to the overwhelming Catholic power block in the city. J. J. Woltjer and K. W. Swart emphasize that Haarlem was to remain Catholic according to the terms of the Satisfaction, and they avoid the term "religious peace settlement" altogether.[5] This gives a more realistic picture of the situation in the city. In their view, the allocation of one church to the Reformed should be regarded as a political manoeuvre by the Prince; and in this Spaans agrees with them.[6]

Tilius's hard job was made all the more difficult by the opposition of Coornhert, whose voice was raised in the city from the end of March 1577. The controversy between the two of them developed in a city that had long been loyal to the king and was almost entirely Catholic. As yet, the people of Haarlem clearly showed a clear lack of enthusiasm for the Revolt. Tilius mistrusted the city's population, though he felt he had little to fear from leading Catholic dignitaries. After a short meeting which included the vicar general of the diocese of Haarlem, Tilius was confident that these men were not penetrating critics.[7] He made a very different assessment of Coornhert, who not only had a reputation for verbal agility, but was also inclined to put his views down on paper. At that time, printed works in which Coornhert expressed criticism of the Reformed Church had been circulating for years.[8]

---

[4] Examples would be the religious truces that William proposed in, for instance, Brussels (September 1578) and Mechelen (October 1578). The Prince wanted to guarantee freedom of religion to both Catholics and Reformed in these cities. A case for this was made in two requests that the Prince addressed to the governor general and the Council of State in the summer of 1578. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 195; M. E. H. N. Mout, "Het intellectuele milieu van Willem van Oranje", *BMGN* 99 (1984), 596–625: 612.

[5] J. J. Woltjer, "Het Noorden en de Pacificatie van Gent" in *Opstand en pacificatie in de Lage Landen: Bijdrage tot de studie van de Pacificatie van Gent* (Ghent, 1976), 84–85; K. W. Swart, *Willem van Oranje en de Nederlandse Opstand, 1572–1584*, ed. R. P. Fagel, M. E. H. N. Mout and H. F. K. van Nierop (The Hague, 1994), 115.

[6] Spaans, *Haarlem na de reformatie*, 50.

[7] Tilius to Cornelisz, 24 March 1577, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 43: "Vides hos homines nihil sacrarum literarum neque bonorum authorum legisse."

[8] Coornhert's most extensive theological treatise had until then been his *Vande toelatinghe ende decrete Godes bedenckinghe of de heylighe Schrift ooc in hout sulcx als meesters Iohan Calvijn ende Theodore Besa daer van leeren* of 1572. Coornhert had this

It is not really clear to what extent Tilius's controversy with Coornhert, which culminated in an extensive correspondence, should be seen as a purely internal affair for the city of Haarlem. Tilius himself regarded the Coornhert affair as a general problem for the church, which should be of concern to ministers outside Haarlem. He passed the matter on to his fellow ministers in Delft, Cornelisz and Donteclock, requesting the support of the court preacher Jean Taffin (1529–1602)[9] and the Leiden professor Guillaume de Feugueray (died 1613). [10] To do so made perfect sense in light of the attack that Coornhert had launched. This was not aimed at a local Reformed congregation in Haarlem or elsewhere, but took in all the churches teaching Reformed doctrine as found in the writings of Calvin and Beza. Coornhert explicitly stressed the general applicability of his argument. [11]

Nevertheless, Haarlem was the location in which the Coornhert affair arose. However general Coornhert's case, Tilius's specific position in Haarlem is worth a closer look. For one thing, in this city it was plain for all to see that the Reformed made up a tiny minority of the population, a fact that was less obviously true for other towns in Holland. Tilius's sense of speaking for a vulnerable church was particularly acute but would have been shared by his fellow ministers elsewhere. For another, Tilius's experience indicates just where the vulnerability of the Reformed Church, in Haarlem and elsewhere, was most felt. Tilius operated in a world in which reality was shaped by gossip and backbiting. The minister was continually faced with all sorts of rumours that put the Reformed Church in a bad light. Coornhert

---

anti-Reformed piece printed at Altena during his exile in Emden, with the intention of disseminating it in the Low Countries.

[9] *NNBW* X, 1011–1012; *Biografisch Lexicon* IV, 412–414; C. Boer, *Hofpredikers van Prins Willem van Oranje: Jean Taffin en Pierre Loyseleur de Villiers* (The Hague, 1952), 8–30, 43–53, 154–174.

[10] *NNBW* III, 398–402; *BWPGN* III, 49–51; Otterspeer, *Groepsportret* I, 65.

[11] D. V. Coornhert, *Redene mijnder woorden houdende, dat die roomsche kercke beter sij dan der gereformeerden* (autograph copy), UBA, Collectie Mennonitica, MS XXVII A 2312, fo. 1: "when referring to the Reformed Church, I do not mean the church in Haarlem, Delft, Leiden, or any particular churches, but all churches that take the Genevan teachers, or Calvinian and Bezan teachings and writings for true doctrine [*metten name ghereformeerde kercke, en meyne ick niet de kercke tot Haerlem, Delft, Leiden, ofte andere bysondere kercken, maer alle kercken welcker leeraren de Geneefsche, ofte calviniaensche, oock besanische leere ende schriften voor de ware leere achten].*" This letter is included in J. G. de Hoop Scheffer, *Inventaris der archiefstukken berustende bij de vereenigde doopsgezinde gemeente te Amsterdam* , vol. 1, *Archief betreffende de doopsgezinden in 't algemeen* (Amsterdam, 1883), inv. no. 2312.

too first attacked him indirectly, by initiating "talk" in the street. Tilius did not leave such talk unanswered. His numerous letters show him trying to bring 'good news' to the world.

Tilius's correspondence throws light not only on the state of the Reformed Church, but also on the origin of religious disputations in this period. Tilius was a great proponent of disputation. He put a lot of time and trouble into bringing about a religious disputation in Woerden, even after having moved to Haarlem. In doing so he had to face a widespread conviction—personified in the Prince of Orange—that theological debates were a prime threat to public order. Despite this, Tilius persisted in his attempt to bring about a colloquy with the Lutherans of Woerden. In this regard too, Tilius's activities while in Haarlem give greater depth to our picture of the conflict with Coornhert.

The people of Haarlem openly and fervently practised their Catholic faith. Upon his arrival, Tilius was shocked. On 24 March 1577 he wrote of his experience to Cornelisz in Delft, a fellow minister to whom he regularly addressed letters. The presence of a Catholic majority in the city cannot have been a surprise, but the flamboyance of their religious practices surpassed his worst expectations. Many had a domestic altar, and the city had a lively sacramental devotion. According to Tilius the inhabitants called themselves "sacramentarians" [12] and they were "threefold, fourfold papist".[13] There was a worrying lack of discipline, which led Tilius in one of his letters to Cornelisz to seek solace in the story of the Tower of Babel, predicting that Holland's own Tower of Babel would soon collapse.[14]

During the transition to the Pacification there had been only small numbers of the Reformed in Haarlem. [15] Nevertheless, Tilius was upbeat when telling Cornelisz about the rapid growth of his congregation.

---

[12] In Reformation historiography the term 'sacramentarian' usually has the opposite meaning. Even in the sixteenth century the use of the term in the sense intended by Tilius was idiosyncratic. See J. Trapman, "Le rôle des 'sacramentaires' des origines de la Réforme jusqu'en 1530 aux Pays-Bas", *NAKG* 63 (1983), 1–24.

[13] Tilius to Cornelisz, 24 March 1577, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 43: "Vix credas quo recederint hic cives. Singulae fere domus (quod nusquam hactenus vidi) suas habent imagines, nempe Ciborii, ut vocant, quo deus eorum panaceus gestatur, quo declarent se Sacramentarios esse et terque quaterque papistas."

[14] Tilius to Cornelisz, 1 April 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling" 127: "[. ..] et statim concidet tam splendide exaedificata turris Babel."

[15] Joke Spaans, *Haarlem na de reformatie*, 50.

On 27 March 1577 he wrote, "I thank the Lord our God, that He gives us more to our preaching than we had looked for, for today we had many, by the grace of God, and all things advance well." [16] It is difficult to judge in how far he was exaggerating. The same letter does show that Tilius attached great importance to making a favourable impression. Cornelisz was asked to communicate the good news at once to Van der Mijle and Cornelis de Coninck (died 1582), [17] councillors in the Court of Holland and confidants of the Prince. It was a matter of urgency that the success be followed up. Tilius encouraged Cornelisz to send members of the church in Delft to Haarlem for Easter to celebrate the Supper of the Lord. Members who had fled Amsterdam and Haarlem were to be encouraged to attend too. [18] On 11 April another positive message could be sent to Delft: at Easter, Tilius had welcomed 27 communicants from Haarlem itself, and 102 from out of town. [19]

This news could not disguise the fact that Tilius found the going in Haarlem heavy. One of his worries was Coornhert, and the many like him, who together with the Catholics would have wished the Reformed out of town, or at any rate sought further to deepen religious division. In August 1577 Tilius soberly stated that his replacement should be of strong calibre.[20] He also wrote to Cornelisz about the rumours circulating in Haarlem: only five people had turned up for the Reformed service, and Tilius himself had given up trying. It was being said that the Prince had recalled him to Delft.[21] This last allegation in particular touched a nerve with Tilius. In everything he did the minister was responsible to the Prince, whose policies did not always accord with his own views. When C. Boer cautiously postulates that Tilius was "to

---

[16] Tilius to Cornelisz, 27 March 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 123: "Ick dancke den Heere onzen Godt, dat Hy ons meer volcx ter predicatiën is gevende dan wij vermeynt hadden; want wij heden veel volcx gehadt hebben door Godes genade, ende alle dingen gaen wel toe."

[17] De Coninck was mayor of Delft and was among the first curators of Leiden University. Van der Aa IV, 659.

[18] Tilius to Cornelisz, 27 March 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 123–124.

[19] Tilius to Cornelisz, 11 April 1577, in ibidem, 131: "Fuerunt 27 ex numero civium qui Coenae participes fuerunt. Inquilini et extranei 102."

[20] Tilius to Cornelisz, 6 August 1577, in ibidem, 143: "Quum vero hic habeamus vel Veltium illum, Volckerium et eiusdem farinae multos, qui nituntur cum Papistis obruere aut saltem dissipare ecclesiam [. ..]. Viris enim auctoritate aliqua praeditis hic opus est."

[21] Tilius to Cornelisz, 1 April 1577, in ibidem, 126: "Sparserant passim famam me desponso animo abiisse, revocatum a Principe."

some extent […] burdened under his employment to the Prince", it is far from an overstatement. [22]

From 1575 Tilius had been employed as a court preacher in the Prince's service. He was not attached to William's itinerant household, but nonetheless he was seldom to be found in Delft, his home base. At the Prince's command, Tilius spent 1577 and 1578 in Haarlem and Amsterdam, after these cities had been brought into the Orangist camp. Tilius frequently consulted William. [23] He cautioned colleagues to bear in mind the importance of taking the Prince's wishes into account.[24] In 1577 William twice briefly visited Haarlem.[25] This meant that oral consultation could take place between the Prince and his court preacher. Tilius also tried to make the Prince receptive to his plans in other ways. He kept in touch with men who had William's ear, such as Taffin, Marnix and Van der Mijle. Conversely, William also made use of this network of informal contacts to bring Tilius round to his way of thinking without having to resort to direct command. The disputation in Woerden led to some degree of estrangement between Tilius and his Prince. The tensions can be sensed in the correspondence between Tilius and Cornelisz, even though Tilius did his utmost to present William as the champion of the Reformed cause.

On 25 June 1577 Tilius passed on news from Marnix in a letter to Cornelisz. At a meeting in Haarlem, William had hauled the bishop, Godfried van Mierlo (1518–1587), over the coals. Tilius peppered his account with lively quotations. This story was a counterbalance to the equally juicy gossip circulating about the Reformed. The Prince did not beat about the bush, but announced to the bishop: "You have preached that Calvin's doctrine is false and full of lies, aye, that our books are as full of lies as an egg is of its contents. I say, that you lie and that you are as full of lies as the sea is full of water, which is far more than the contents of an egg." [26] But the Prince went even further.

---

[22] Boer, *Hofpredikers*, 5.

[23] Ibidem.

[24] Tilius to Cornelisz, 11 April 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 131: "Tu insta apud Fugereum et Sanctaldegondium ut concedatur modesta disputatio et—si vult Princeps—aliquis ordonetur qui praesit [. ..]."

[25] For the Prince's movements see H. J. P. van Alfen, "Dagregister van 's Prinsen levensloop", in *Prins Willem van Oranje, 1533–1933* (Haarlem, 1933), 409–452.

[26] Tilius to Cornelisz, 25 June 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 137: "Ghij hebt gepredickt, dat Calvini leere valsch ende vol leugenen is, ja, dat onze boeken vol leugenen sijn, so vol als een ey vol suyvels. Ic segge, dat ghij er aen liecht ende

When Van Mierlo—who in light of the religious tensions in the city was dependent on William's good will—went on to ask whether he could continue to count on the income he had been promised, the Prince sarcastically countered that St Peter had asked Christ the same question.[27] In light of this, who could doubt William's complete commitment to the Reformed cause?

According to L. J. Rogier there is probably a kernel of truth in the account given by Tilius (to whose status as a "renegade abbot" he explicitly draws attention), but the minister's words have to be regarded as "eked out with fantasy".[28] Little can be said against this. It is unlikely that William, who wished to preserve religious peace, would have addressed the bishop in such bald terms. Rogier did not go into what the kernel of truth was that he thought the story contained, but it is clear that the Prince considered a reprimand appropriate after the bishop had openly criticized Reformed doctrine. The Catholics in the city had, after all, subscribed to the Treaty of Satisfaction, with its guarantees for the celebration of Reformed services in the city. The bishop in particular had to be careful to adhere to the terms of the Satisfaction. According to Woltjer, treaties of this kind were concluded "in the spirit of the Pacification, that is to say in an attempt at reconciliation".[29] Furthermore, the Prince wished to preserve peace and order in the city. He personally guaranteed the safety of the city's Catholics, from whom he in turn expected loyalty to the policy of pacification.

The Reformed clergy, including Tilius, found themselves obliged to keep to Orange's moderate course. The Prince took account of the people's resentments against the Reformed Church. Many feared that this church would impose a new yoke, and saw freedom of conscience endangered at the coming of the Reformed. Some even saw them as "new papists".[30] One of Marnix's letters from this period indicates that

---

dat ghij so vol leugenen steeckt als de zee vol waters, 't welck meer is dan een ey vol suyvels."

[27] Tilius to Cornelisz, 25 June 1577, in ibidem, 137: "Addidit Sanctaldegundius, quum Episcopus pudefactus se commendaret gratiae illust. Principis et oraret ut qui sibi promissi erant proventus sarti tecti manerent, illust. Principem Episcopo dixisse per ironiam aut sarcasmum: 'Idem Sanctus Petrus Christum orabat."

[28] L. J. Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam, 1964) I, 228.

[29] Woltjer, "Het Noorden en de Pacificatie van Gent", 82.

[30] Benjamin J. Kaplan, "'Remnants of the Papal Yoke': Apathy and Opposition in the Dutch Reformation", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994), 662.

the Prince was sensitive to the fact that many people gave ear to such talk.[31] He was, accordingly, very cool towards theological debate. Any involvement of the authorities in public religious disputations would too easily give substance to the notion that in case of religious controversy the Reformed were trying to achieve their ends with government support. Any such appearance would not only fail to advance their cause but would also reflect poorly on the States. In June 1577, when Tilius insisted to the Prince that Bishop Van Mierlo's provocation should be countered with a public disputation, the Prince would not hear of it. Tilius's assertion that the latter was more in favour of a written debate with Catholic *doctores* from the southern provinces, just like his story about the meeting between the Prince and the bishop, probably has a kernel of truth. The Prince's noncommittal response that he would "give the matter serious consideration", rather gives the impression that Tilius was putting a better face on the exchange than the facts warranted, in the hope that these reports to Cornelisz would boost Reformed morale.

It is surprising that William was still willing to exchange thoughts with Tilius about the organization of theological debates in June 1577. Two months earlier, the Woerden disputation had led to high tension between the two of them. It is remarkable that throughout this period William never openly fell out with his court preacher. This is very different from the treatment of leading Catholics, such as Van Mierlo. The bishop was put on the spot, while Tilius was subjected only to indirect influence. Tilius's enthusiasm for disputation was such that in the case of Woerden he simply shrugged off the pressure brought to bear.

The religious disputation in the Lutheran enclave of Woerden engaged Tilius's efforts from March to May 1577.[32] He did his utmost to prevent a loss of face for the Reformed Church, even risking his good relations with the Prince by pushing forth the debate.

Tilius had indeed been active in bringing about the debate in Woerden, but he played no part in the concluding discussions. The

---

[31] See p. 136.

[32] On Lutheranism in Woerden see J. W. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het lutheranisme in de Nederlanden tot 1618* (Haarlem, 1911), 300–309; J. Loosjes, *Geschiedenis der lutherse kerk in de Nederlanden* (The Hague, 1921), 63–66. These studies make no mention of the debate in Woerden, in contrast to H. J. Jaanus, *Hervormd Delft ten tijde van Arent Cornelisz. (1573–1605)* (Amsterdam, 1950), 150–151; Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien*, 157.

course of events can only partially be reconstructed. The first round of talks took place from 5 to 8 March 1577. [33] The protocols of the disputation show that both Tilius and Cornelisz spoke in Woerden against the Lutheran preacher Johannes Saliger, also known as Beatus.[34] This Saliger had provoked the debate by expressing fierce criticism of one of Tilius's sermons. In January Tilius had presided over worship at the Castle of Woerden where the governor for the States, Roelof van Stakenbroek, resided.[35] In the course of doing so Tilius proclaimed a view of baptism that Saliger could not accept. The religious disputation dealt with infant baptism, and in particular with the untimely deaths of unbaptized newborns.[36]

The parties went their separate ways on Friday, 8 March 1577. [37] Tilius presumably returned home earlier, for he seems to have had no part in the abrupt conclusion to the discussions. [38] The parties did not meet again the following week; Cornelisz must have given in to the pressure of the Prince and his entourage. In this regard Tilius talks about a letter that Marnix addressed to Cornelisz, to a fellow minister in Delfshaven,[39] and to the governor of Woerden, telling them that the religious disputation should be brought to an end as speedily as possible.[40] Marnix emphasized to Cornelisz and his fellows that this would have to be before Sunday, so that the people of Woerden should not think that the preachers were abandoning the disputation from an inability to make their case. [41]

---

[33] Acts of the disputation in Woerden, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 638, fos. 1–85.

[34] J. Loosjes, *Naamlijst van predikanten, hoogleeraren en proponenten der luthersche kerk in Nederland* (The Hague, 1925), 275–276; *BWNG* III, 250–253. Originally from Lübeck; his dates of birth and death are unknown.

[35] Van der Aa, XVIII, 94; Van Stakenbroek's dates of birth and death are unknown.

[36] Jaanus, *Hervormd Delft*, 151–153 gives a clear exposition of the theological background to the disputation.

[37] Tilius to Cornelisz, 6 April 1577, van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 130: "[. ..] sed videndum est tame nut absolvatur ante diem sabbati."

[38] According to the record, Tilius only spoke on 5 March 1577. GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 638.

[39] This indicates the involvement in the Woerden disputation of Cornelis Corstensz. (ca. 1540–1582), also known as 'Christiani'. He was at the time the only minister active in Delfshaven. *Biografisch lexicon* V, 124.

[40] Tilius to Cornelisz, 6 April 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling," 130: "Scripsit Sanctaldegundius in litteris disputationem esse quam primum abrumpendam."

[41] Ibidem: "[…] sed videndum est tamen ut absolvatur ante diem sabbati, nec dicendum est hoc scriptum esse, ne existiment Woerdenses nos latebras quaerere et per cuniculos velle abrumpere colloquium, quasi causam malam haberemus."

It is typical that Tilius only saw Marnix's letter in April. By opening up about the pressure he had been put under, Cornelisz was trying to convince Tilius that the Prince's decision was irreversible. After his departure from Woerden, Tilius was out of the loop; he learnt from Marnix's letter that somebody else had signed the protocols on his behalf.[42] This gave the impression that the ministers were singing from the same sheet, precisely the impression that Tilius sought to dispel when writing to his fellow minister in Delft. In contrast to Cornelisz, he was not resigned to the abandonment of the debate in Woerden.

The threesome Taffin, Marnix and Van der Mijle had applied gradually increasing pressure to the ministers to stop the debate in Woerden. They even called upon the Prince, who had duly expressed his disapproval of the debate in strong terms. Tilius was deaf to these warnings from on high. On 1 March, Taffin wrote to him expressly that the Prince was against any sort of public controversy.[43] Tilius pressed on regardless. When the discussions were stopped, he turned his attention to Cornelisz, in the hope of convincing him to relaunch the disputation.[44] Cornelisz repeatedly received appeals from Haarlem drawing his attention to his duty to serve God's cause, to comfort and succour the weaker brethren.[45] Cornelisz, however, felt little for Tilius's plans and drew his colleague's attention to Marnix's (and Van der Mijle's) letter underlining the Prince's intransigence.[46]

---

[42] Ibidem: "His litteris aut domino gubernatori aut tibi aut Delffshaviensi potestatem facio ut disputationi meo nomine aliquis subscribat." In May Cornelisz signed the final version of the acts, "also at the request of and on behalf of my assistant Thomae van Thielt." GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 638, fo. 149.

[43] Taffin to Tilius, 1 March 1577, in *Brieven uit onderscheidene kerkelijke archieven*, ed. J. J. van Toorenenbergen, WMV, ser. 3, part 5 (Utrecht 1885) 176: "Virulentos autem illorum sermones et contumeliosa scripta compescendi ratio, vel disputatione publica, vel editis scriptis, Illustrissimo Principi non probabitur."

[44] Tilius to Cornelisz, 27 March 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling" 124: "Non negligenda neque praetereunda est, mi collega, disputatio Woerdensis,"; same to same, 3 April 1577, in ibidem, 129: "Omnino censeo disputationem Woerdensem prosequendam,"; same to same, 11 April 1577, in ibidem, 131: "[. . .] te oro ut illam disputationem promoveas, et secundum nostra promissa facias," and "Tu insta apud Fugereum et Sanctaldegondium ut concedatur modesta disputatio et - si vult Princeps - aliquis ordonetur qui praesit [. . .]. Hoc age, mi frater."

[45] Ibidem, 130: "Vos viriliter agite et cogitate esse causam Domini Dei vestri, qui fideles servos consolabitur iuvabitque."

[46] Ibidem, 129–130: "Quantam potui adhibui diligentiam ut impetrarem ab illustr. Principe consensum veniendi Woerdam sed nulla ratione hoc impetrare potui, quod d. Sanct Aldegundius et Van der Mylen suis litteris testantur."

Cornelisz did not remain passive, but wished to walk the royal highway. He contacted Taffin, who showed great understanding for the position in which Cornelisz found himself. As long as the religious disputation was left hanging, it could be said in Woerden that the preachers had been vanquished. [47] Taffin tried to convince Cornelisz that the debate should be concluded in writing. He thought it would be possible to get the Prince to agree to this. [48] In the mean time, however, Tilius's patience had run out. On 25 April he informed Cornelisz that he had taken matters into his own hands. In a letter to the governor of Woerden and to Saliger, Tilius had solemnly undertaken to resume the discussion within the fortnight. [49] This was what brought Tilius into William's disfavour, and fear of the Prince's anger kept him from taking any further part in the disputation himself. [50]

Now it was Cornelisz who found himself facing a *fait accompli*. From 7 to 9 May he took part in a second round of talks in Woerden. [51] A letter from Van der Mijle on the eve of the disputation, again communicating the Prince's displeasure, could not prevent him from proceeding.[52] Cornelisz must, however, have asked for changes to the format of the disputation. In the second round Cornelisz and Saliger did not debate one another, but each in turn presented his own position on the basis of a series of theses. [53] With these two monologues the disputation came to an end.

The course of events surrounding the Woerden disputation makes it clear that William of Orange wanted to steer religious affairs without enforcing his will on anyone. This gave someone like Tilius room

---

[47] Taffin to Cornelisz, 26 March 1577, in *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 5, ed. Van Toorenenbergen, 182: "Non enim cessuri sunt illi, etiam si se constrictos sentiant. Imo de victoria, ut apud eiusmodi ingenia moris est, apud suos gloriabuntur."

[48] Taffin to Cornelisz, 8 April 1577, in Ibidem, 188: "Proclivior erit Princeps huic disputationi scripto quam verbo permittendae. Quod consultissimum mihi videatur propono. Vos dispicite."

[49] Tilius to Cornelisz, 25 April 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling" 132: "Misi unas litteras Woerdam, ad Gubernatorem et Beatum [i.e. Saliger, M.R.], quibus promitto colloquium intra 14 dies, teque excuso quod non licuerit prius venire."

[50] Tilius to Cornelisz, 2 May 1577, in Ibidem, 133: "Ego lupum auribus teneo. Velim adesse disputationi sed vereor offensam Principis tum et offendiculum quod hic nascetur. Tamen veniam Woerdam si qua ratione fieri possit."

[51] GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 638, fos. 86–149.

[52] Jaanus, *Hervormd Delft*, 150–151.

[53] List of theses for use in the disputation in Woerden, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 640.

to persist in his desire to maintain the good name of the Reformed Church through disputation. Talk on the street could easily be turned against the ministers. Tilius feared that as long as the Woerden debate had not been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, it could give occasion for mockery of the Reformed by Catholics, Baptists, and "all others we might yet challenge to disputation". [54] From the Woerden affair it was only one small step to the Coornhert affair.

Pestilens ille homo

The controversy with Coornhert did not take Tilius by surprise. He was already aware of his opponent's theological positions and his aversion to the Reformed Church and its doctrines. [55] On 24 March 1577, Tilius let Cornelisz know that Coornhert was in town. The minister makes a direct connection between Coornhert's return and the still smouldering conflict in Woerden. He regrets that Coornhert had arrived in Haarlem before victory had been achieved in Woerden: "Even before the victory, that pestilential Coornhert is here." [56] For anyone in the know it was clear that Tilius was expecting a new controversy.

Now that the Woerden affair was threatening to coincide with a Coornhert affair, Tilius was worried that he would be overstretched. Cornelisz in Delft would not have his hands free while the Woerden debate was still pending. In light of the Prince's opposition, Tilius must primarily have been worried that the postponement of victory in Woerden created an unfavourable climate for a new disputation. Triumph in Woerden, on the other hand, might soften the attitude of William and of other magistrates who were concerned to prevent theological debate.

---

[54] Tilius to Cornelisz, 11 April 1577, in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 131: "Nam nisi hoc fiat non solum periclitatur veritas et honor Dei nostrarumque ecclesiarum, sed etiam Anabaptistis, Papistis et omnibus quos ad disputationem provocabimus erimus ridiculo, qui provocati dicent: ite ad Woerdanos et illic solvite argumenta vobis obiecta, imo absolvite disputationem vestram."

[55] In a poem prefixed to the treatise *Vande toelatinghe ende decrete Gods* (1572) Coornhert had already warned against the manner in which Reformed ministers twisted the words of the Bible. They would also "greedily suck the people's blood" and have them groan under an "alien yoke".

[56] Tilius to Cornelisz, 24 March 1577, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 43: "ante victoriam pestilens ille homo Cornhert hic est."

The Prince himself was not easy about Coornhert's return. Since 1572 this former secretary to the First Free Assembly of the States had lived in exile at Xanten.[57] The reasons for his departure from Holland in 1572 were not clear. Coornhert himself claimed that he had been forced to flee by a well-founded fear of the threats of the insurgent commander Willem van der Marck, Lord of Lumey (ca. 1542–1578).[58] The Prince, however, felt it necessary to question Coornhert about the issue shortly after his arrival in Haarlem. According to the latter, the Prince's commissioners bore him a "particular hatred" and insinuated that he was an "arch papist".[59] William and his supporters felt they had reason enough to suspect Coornhert's loyalty to the Revolt. Did they not have ample reason to believe that his flight into exile related to his outspoken criticisms of the political and religious changes that had come about in Holland since 1572?

In 1576 Coornhert addressed a petition to Philip II requesting restitution of his property in the Low Countries.[60] Coornhert regarded Philip as the rightful ruler over the Netherlands and spoke of "le mutineux pays d'Hollande".[61] He indicated that Lumey's threats had again driven him into exile. It is, however, possible that this was no more than the occasion for his departure. Coornhert laid great emphasis on the disappointment that had overcome him in 1572, when he realized that he would not be able to help the Catholics of Holland. In accepting the post of secretary to the States his hope had been to protect this vulnerable group. When he became aware of his powerlessness to do so, he chose a quiet life of poverty in Xanten rather than a wealthy life in Holland, where he had been a helpless onlooker to the oppression of Catholics.[62] Bonger considers the petition to the king of Spain "a black page" in the "otherwise so untainted" book of Coornhert's life, attributing it to opportunism and claiming that he lied to the king.[63]

---

[57] Bonger, *Life and Work*, 58.

[58] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [5r]. On Lumey see J. C. A. de Meij, *De watergeuzen en de Nederlanden, 1568–1572* , Verhandelingen KNAW, new ser., part 77, no. 2 (Amsterdam 1972) 69–99.

[59] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [5r].

[60] These had been declared forfeit in 1567 when Coornhert fled from Alva. See Bonger, *Life and Work*, 50.

[61] Bonger, *Life and Work*, 78.

[62] Bonger, *Life and Work*, 64–65.

[63] Ibidem, 67.

As a mitigating circumstance Bonger does mention that Coornhert was suffering from homesickness and poverty.[64] Bonger does not give the content of the petition any serious consideration.

In my view this petition provides an excellent view of Coornhert's position. When the Reformed Church began to function as the public church of Holland in 1572, Coornhert could no longer identify himself with William's political-religious policies. From Xanten he had bombarded the Prince with warnings. In 1572 he had had an extensive anti-Calvinist treatise[65] printed (in Dutch!) and sent to "the person to whom it belonged".[66] In this piece Coornhert not only rejected the doctrine of the Reformed Church, but also expressed his expectation that power-hungry ministers would not refrain from forcing consciences.[67] Tilius and other ministers were naturally aware of this treatise before Coornhert's return, and framed their idea of the man accordingly. Coornhert had also, from his place of exile, directed a now-lost "advertisement" to the Prince, speaking of his fatherland as an "exhausted and consumed little country".[68] The tendency of the piece can easily be guessed. In Coornhert's eyes the Prince of Orange had made a terrible mistake in tying the Revolt to the Reformed cause. When the Pacification of Ghent presented Coornhert with the opportunity to return to Holland, the Prince realized that Coornhert would be able to voice the dissatisfaction of the Catholic majority as nobody else could. He saw reason enough to have Coornhert closely watched. With the Pacification of Ghent falling apart, and the renewal of war becoming unavoidable,[69] the Prince could not afford religious unrest.

Coornhert was not isolated in Haarlem. In the years before his flight from Alva in 1567 he had been secretary to the city council and had become friends with members of the urban elite, including a number of (former) mayors. As no drastic changes were made in Haarlem's government when the city went over to the Revolt,[70] Coornhert could count on highly placed contacts at his return in 1577. The magistrates

---

[64] Coornhert also asks Philip to allow him "la frequentation de vostre pays," "nonobstant ladite declaration du bannissement et confiscation." Bonger, *Life and Work*, 78.

[65] The treatise in question is *Vande toelatinghe ende decrete Godts* (Altena, 1572).

[66] Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 13, 82v. This is presumably a reference to the Prince of Orange.

[67] Coornhert, *Vande toelatinghe ende decrete Godts*, preliminary matter.

[68] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 264r: "uyt-ghepudt ende uyt-geteert landeken".

[69] See pp. 20–21.

[70] Spaans, *Haarlem na de reformatie*, 52–55.

Gerrit Stuver[71] and Jan van Zuren [72] were among his allies. [73] He also remained friends with regents who had now become members of the Reformed Church. The influential mayor of Haarlem, Van der Laan, mediated between Coornhert and the States and encouraged the debate with Reformed ministers. He showed great interest in religious matters and conducted lively debates with Coornhert about faith and church. These conversations inspired Coornhert to write a number of treatises, among them a dialogue with Van der Laan. [74]

On his return to Haarlem, Coornhert quickly sought a meeting with a pair of "honourable men of state" whom he regarded as "old acquaintances and friends". They had since become attached to the Reformed faith.[75] Coornhert played for high stakes, directly confronting them with his suspicion that the Reformed ministers, if they took the writings of Calvin and Beza seriously, must to some degree favour a policy of religious persecution. [76] Coornhert's combative language will have unsettled the two regents:

> From which I fear nothing more certain than ere long in Holland and Zeeland constraint of conscience, then the killing of heretics, and at last new confusion among the people, contempt for the government, riot, division and destruction (as from like cause fell to the king) to the decay of the county and the people. To help prevent which (as much as I can) I am determined to use against it all the means that God has put at my disposal to serve the liberty and peace of the commonwealth in faith and matters appertaining to it, whether with printed writings, or otherwise, as I think fit.[77]

---

[71] Stuver was still mayor in 1579 and was known as a champion of religious leniency. See A. Hamilton, *The Family of Love* (Cambridge, 1981), 106.

[72] Van Zuren had been appointed mayor in 1573 under Spanish authority. Despite his compromised position he maintained his position in political life after 1577. See Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland* , 251.

[73] In 1579 they were present at an informal debate between Coornhert and the Haarlem minister Damius at the home of Van der Laan. Stuver and Van Zuren presented themselves as sympathizers of Coornhert, but took no part in the discussions. See p. 187.

[74] Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwangh* . On the use of the dialogue format in Coornhert's works, see Marcel F. Fresco, "Coornhert en zijn transformatie van een platonische dialoog" in *Op zoek naar hoger honing? Plato en platonisme in de Nederlandse literatuur*, ed. Marcel F. Fresco and Rudi van der Paardt (Groningen, 1998), 52–71.

[75] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [4r].

[76] Ibidem.

[77] Ibidem: "Daer wt ick dan niet seekerders en mach beduchten, dan in Hollandt ende Zeelandt eer lang nieuwe dwang inde conscientien, dan voorts het ketterdooden, ende ten laetsten van nieus verwerringe onder den landtsaten, verachtinghe der

Behind this strong talk was a man willing to take risks, but not given to recklessness. By trying his "suspicions" against the opinions of a few regents, from whom he expected to hear honest and considered judgements in reply, Coornhert was covering himself against any accusation of being a troublemaker in politically uncertain times. The central issue for him was whether the critical approach he had adopted would advance or damage the common welfare of the Netherlands. How much unrest could a country at war tolerate? Was it not better to remain silent? Coornhert was not concerned only with theological debate, but gave considerable weight to the political consequences of his action. At least, this is how he sought to present himself to his fellow countrymen. He regarded the regents as "proven in civil, indeed in national affairs, such that you can give more certain counsel than others in this, knowing the circumstances (many of which are hidden to others)".[78] They assured him that the ministers were by no means intending to promote constraint of conscience or persecution of heretics in Holland and advised him to keep his peace. Coornhert agreed to do so.[79]

However much Coornhert desired to submit his own judgement to the good of the commonwealth (and the true extent of such a desire is very hard to judge), in practice he was unable to keep to his determination to remain quiet. His exchange with the two friendly regents had not succeeded in calming his troubled mind. He would gladly have moved them to a debate about the rightfulness of killing heretics, but the men could see no benefit from such a debate.[80] As long as Coornhert's suspicions of the ministers had not been allayed, he continued to question whether he could remain silent while his conviction informed him that the country was on the edge of the precipice. Soothing words could not calm him; only clear argumentation would change his mind. Whether Coornhert at this stage would genuinely

---

overheydt, oproer, twedracht ende verderf, (soot wt gelijcke oorsake tegen den coning is ghevallen) tot bederf van landen ende luyden. Om het welck (so vele in my is) te helpen voorcomen, ick in voornemen ben om oock die middelen my van Gode gegeven ten dienste vande gemeenlants vrijheyt ende ruste int ghelove met zijnder aencleven, daer tegen te ghebruicken, het sy dan met gedructe schriften, ofte anders daer ende so ick dat goedt sal vinden."

[78] Ibidem, [4v].

[79] Ibidem.

[80] Ibidem.

have been receptive to counterarguments is doubtful. His primary concern was to convince others that he was right, in the massive certainty that to do so was to serve the common good.

The conversation with the two regents must have had some effect on Coornhert, as in future he avoided publicly broaching the issue of killing heretics. It might also be that rather than discuss such hypothetical topics, Coornhert preferred to stick to issues that touched the lives of the people of Haarlem. He caused a great deal of agitation in the city, not by casting doubt on the noble intentions of the Reformed ministers, but by expressing criticism of the religious choice of individuals in Haarlem who had gone over to the Reformed Church. How could they say with any certainty that this had been a good choice? During a meal with friends he found himself sitting opposite such a convert. Coornhert was annoyed that the man made much of his new membership of the Reformed Church, but could give no good grounds for his decision. "Now the reasons that he gave were so blue, that I easily saw that this good man had as little knowledge of the church he had adopted, as of that he had left."[81] Coornhert threw out the remark: "It is to be questioned whether you have found better than you have cast aside."[82]

In his account of the series of events behind the Leiden disputation Coornhert tried to give the impression that this was the only incident in which he was not the victim of others' malice. He complained of a drunkard reviling him as "papist". According to Coornhert the man was simply imitating the slanderous talk of the Prince's commissioners, who had called him an "arch papist".[83] Nevertheless, Coornhert had threatened to report the drunk to Tilius and to the Prince, who was then in the city. This incident leads one to suspect that Coornhert was causing a to-do in wider circles than domestic table talk could reach. Tilius's letters confirm that Coornhert's behaviour had broader resonance in Haarlem.[84] The minister reported that his open

[81] Ibidem, [5r]: "Nu waren zijne redenen so blaeu die hy daer toe bruyckte, dat ick lichtelijck merckte, dat die geode man soo weynich kennisse hadde vande kercke die by hem aengenomen, als verlaten was."

[82] Ibidem: "Het soude noch al te bedencken staen, of ghy beter hebt gevonden dan verworpen."

[83] Ibidem.

[84] Tilius to Cornelisz, 6 August 1577, Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 143: "Quum vero hic habeamus vel Veltium illum, Volckerium et eiusdem farinae multos."

criticism of the Reformed Church was having an impact on many of the faithful.[85]

Time and again, Tilius's letters to Cornelisz refer to the danger posed by Coornhert. "Trustworthy persons say that this Theodorus Coornhert assails us with great effort, that he prevents the Lord's work and leads many to be ill-disposed towards the congregation", he wrote on 3 April 1577.[86] In the course of time Tilius was no longer limited to sending Cornelisz rumours about Coornhert, but could provide first-hand reports. On 25 June 1577, without beating about the bush, Tilius wrote that Coornhert was making it impossible for him to carry out the Lord's work in Haarlem. Ever and again the man was ready to enter into debate with anybody willing to engage him, and he was succeeding in keeping the people from hearing God's word. It vexed Tilius that Coornhert could carry on in this manner unpunished, to the great harm of the Reformed congregation.[87]

At the beginning of May 1577 Tilius had made the personal acquaintance of Coornhert, who had taken the initiative of paying the minister a visit.[88] Shortly afterwards Tilius received a short treatise in which Coornhert set out his criticisms of the Reformed Church.[89] The three-page work was the provocation that Tilius had been waiting for since the end of March, when he had already hinted that conflict with Coornhert was inevitable. Receiving it may well have given Tilius a feeling of relief, as it finally provided the pretext he had needed to reply to Coornhert's criticisms. Tilius thought the time not yet ripe

---

[85] Tilius to Cornelisz, [May 1577], in ibidem, 125: "Est homo perniciosissimus et multos seduxit."

[86] Tilius to Cornelisz, 3 April 1577, in ibidem, 129: "Theodoricus ille Cornhert nobis magnopere adversari a fide dignis dicitur, et impedire opus Domini, plerosque avertere a concionibus."

[87] Tilius to Cornelisz, 25 juni 1577, in ibidem, 138–139: "Iam dicitur mihi a consule Theod. Volckertsz Coornthert (sic) publice ubique iactatum se paratum contra quemlibet quomodocumque volent disputare. Hic homo impune facit omnia, avertit populum a Verbo Dei et est pestilentissimus huic ecclesiae. … Nam opus Domini in hac civitate impedit."

[88] The dating is uncertain. On 2 May 1577 Tilius informed Cornelisz that Coornhert had visited him, but that he would write about it at greater length another time. Tilius to Cornelisz, 2 May 1577, in ibidem, 135: "Alias dicam aut scribam quod Volckerus Coornhert ultro non lacessitus ad me veniret etc."

[89] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie* , [5v]. The short piece is Coornhert's *Redene.* This treatise was, with some modifications, included in Coornhert's *opera omnia* with the title *Ander ende corter bewijs van mijne ghesproken ende qualijck ghenomen woorden, dat de roomsche kerck beter zij dan der gereformeerden* , in *Wercken* I, 484v–486v.

for a debate, even though the disputation in Woerden was now over. [90] Was Tilius worried about a new confrontation with the Prince? Or did he first want to get Coornhert's measure in written polemic? After a few days Tilius passed the leaflet on to Cornelisz with the request that he indite a "solid" riposte, powerful enough to silence Coornhert. [91]

Is there any reason to doubt Tilius's communications? Was he exaggerating the danger posed by Coornhert, in order to draw Cornelisz into the affair? Two factors suggest that Tilius's warnings were entirely in earnest. Firstly, Tilius would not have sought to get his fellow minister involved had he not thought that he was facing a serious challenge. Like Tilius himself, Cornelisz was a very busy man. Secondly, engaging this "uncircumcised Philistine" in debate was a risky business. [92] Tilius regarded Coornhert as a serious threat to the Reformed Church. He feared that a public quarrel would encourage calumny among the people, which would strengthen Coornhert's hand. To put a stop to the damaging effects of Coornhert's criticisms, Tilius was willing to risk an escalation of the conflict. He was convinced that Coornhert's arguments could not be left unrebutted.

Was it caution or uncertainty that made Tilius urge Cornelisz to tell nobody that he had sent Coornhert's treatise on to Delft? He described Coornhert as a creature desirous of fame and feeding on rumour. He could well imagine the impact of a rumour that the ministers were preoccupied by Coornhert, and that he had forced them to draw up a riposte.[93] The common people would speak disgrace of the public church if it allowed itself to be put in such a tight spot for all to see. Tilius feared that Coornhert would be able to take advantage of the widespread antipathy to Calvinism. He admonished Cornelisz to set about his task with circumspection.

William of Orange's disapproval of disputation, and of religious polemic in general, also induced a careful approach to the Coornhert affair. This was true of all participants in equal measure. Cornelisz had already shown his sensitivity to the pressure that William had

---

[90] The second round of talks was held from 7 to 9 May 1577.

[91] Tilius to Cornelisz, [May 1577], in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling", 125: "Est homo perniciosissimus [. . .] qua re solido aliquo responso confundendus est et reprimendus."

[92] Ibidem: "hunc Philisteum incircumcisum."

[93] Ibidem: "Cupio autem atque obsecro, ne cuipiam dicatur me eius scriptum misisse ad te, ne homo gloriosissimus omnes nos occupatos imo sollicitos dicat ad respondendum. Nam est animal gloriae cupidissimum quod solo vento pascitur."

exercised with regard to religious disputations. He had not dared continue the Woerden disputation on his own authority. To put his Delft colleague in the right frame of mind to engage Coornhert polemically, Tilius emphasized that he had done nothing to provoke Coornhert to a confrontation. On the contrary, he had refused to enter into discussion with Coornhert, on the pretext that he did not have the time. Coornhert had even praised him, in the presence of others, for his moderation![94] Tilius wanted to prevent Cornelisz from suspecting him of having stirred up trouble. In his meeting with Coornhert, Tilius had not entered deeply into discussion, and had indeed said very little. He simply mentioned that he had read some of Coornhert's books and was "amazed" by them. Coornhert had ended up saying that "the Catholic Church was better than the Reformed and more suchlike things", but that had been the end of the conversation. [95]

Coornhert had also been on his guard. He had not wanted to give the impression that he was out for a fight. Shortly before meeting Tilius, he had briefly written to the minister to clear his name. He suspected that Tilius ascribed bad intentions to him because of the rumours circulating in Haarlem. Again Coornhert emphasised that he set out to serve the common cause of peace. In his short talk with Tilius he said that the minister should not suspect him of evil intent.[96] Coornhert's behaviour shows a certain degree of respect for Tilius. In all the quarrels that followed, he never said an unseemly word about the minister, whom he described as a "circumspect, ripe, dispassionate and goodly man".[97] Their shared background may well have played a role here. Both had taken William's side in the very first years of the Revolt. Tilius's direct access to the Prince could also have been a purely pragmatic reason for Coornhert to regard him with a certain awe. Given his vulnerable position in Haarlem—the Prince was having him closely watched—he could not afford to make a personal enemy of the court preacher.

---

[94] Ibidem, 124–125: "Respondi me habere quae agerem, me meum officium velle facere…"; "Quum ille laudaret meam in concionando modestiam."

[95] Ibidem, 125: "[…] dixi paucis me quosdam eius libellos legisse ac in eis multa esse quae mirarer: denique dicere eum papisticam ecclesiam nostra meliorem et pleraque idem generis."

[96] Ibidem: "Hic primum dedit hospiti meo literas ad me, quibus orabat ne quid mali de se suspicarer."

[97] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [6v].

Coornhert's courtesy and Tilius's reserve gave the meeting between the two men a somewhat artificial flavour. In reality both were seeking and expecting confrontation.

Paper Controversy

The disputations in Delft and Leiden were preceded by a written polemic lasting almost nine months, from May 1577 to February 1578. Coornhert's first 'letter' to Tilius, with the revealing title "Reasons for my words to the effect that the Roman church is better than the Reformed" (*Redene mijnder woorden houdende, dat die roomsche kercke beter sij dan der gereformeerden*), was the point of departure for the polemic.[98] After the ministers had replied, solely in Tilius's name,[99] Coornhert responded to their reply and the ministers issued a rejoinder to his response. Of these four pieces, only Coornhert's *Redene* and the ministers' rejoinder survive.[100]

The rejoinder is an extensive but sadly incomplete manuscript written in Cornelisz's hand. The piece is composed in the first person plural, for Cornelisz was also writing on behalf of his fellow ministers, Tilius and Donteclock.[101] The number of deletions and marginal additions indicate that what we have is a draft version. The missing (final) part of the rejoinder can be reconstructed from a Latin summary of the polemic, also surviving in Cornelisz's hand.[102] The latter is more formally structured and lacks the personal tone of the rejoinder, in which irritation and irony often break through.

The Latin treatise is written for theologians, while the rejoinder must be seen as an open letter to all the faithful who queried the identity of the true church. Here and there in his rejoinder Cornelisz addresses the

---

[98] See note 11.

[99] This is apparent from the title of the rejoinder (see the following note). Coornhert rightly assumed that Tilius had received help from Cornelisz and Donteclock in writing the reply. Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [6r].

[100] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt op het schrift van Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert, waerinne hij een verclaringhe doet op zijns selfs eerste schijven aen Thomas van Thielt predicant tot Delft, ende oock te kennen gheeft t'ghene dat hem in desselven predicants beantwoordinghe niet ghenoech doet*, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[101] Donteclock assisted in writing the rejoinder. The draft contains annotations in his hand.

[102] Cornelisz, *Velitatio contra epistolam Coornhertianam, praecipue pertinens ad articulum de ecclesia*, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

reader in a way that suggests he was intending to produce a version in print. In any case, Cornelisz wrote with a public in mind and adapted his arguments for maximum rhetorical effect. This might help explain the length of the rejoinder (about 27,000 words).[103] The exhaustiveness of the argument can be related to the rhetorical technique of *amplificatio*, or more specifically *copia* (copiousness), a stylistic device that now served an educational rather than a decorative purpose.[104]

Coornhert was accustomed to answering his opponents by return; the ministers took far more time over their responses. The reply to Coornhert's *Redene* came only after six months. Tilius had launched the paper controversy, but passed the actual writing on to his fellow minister in Delft, Cornelisz, whom he had also involved in the Woerden affair. He advised Cornelisz to call in the aid of Donteclock, among others.[105] It is hard to tell whether Tilius was acting from lack of time or from a reserve born of his close relationship with the Prince of Orange, who strongly condemned polemics. Cornelisz hardly shared Tilius's enthusiasm for the struggle with Coornhert. It must have been hard for the Delft minister to fit time-consuming composition into his busy daily schedule.

Cornelisz nevertheless persisted dutifully, getting down to writing another extensive treatise after receiving Coornhert's response in November 1577. The number of deletions in the rejoinder indicates that Cornelisz was struggling with his material. No less apparent is the passion with which the piece is written. The author filled no fewer than sixty pages and pulled out all the stops in combating Coornhert. Cornelisz seems to have been converted to the view of Tilius, who for months had seen Coornhert as an immediate and major threat to the church.

In his *Redene* Coornhert had brought up the issue of the true church with polemical violence. The ecclesiological debate that he broached

---

[103] For comparison, the treatise *Redene* was roughly 2,000 words long. The extent of the polemic grew with each rebuttal.

[104] Richard A. Muller, " *Fontes argumentorum* and *capita doctrinae*. Method and Argument in Calvin's Construction of *loci* and *disputationes*," in *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), 143. Melanchthon distinguished a fourth rhetorical genre, the didactic. Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), 194.

[105] Tilius to Cornelisz, [May 1577], in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling," 125: "Dum tibi adest Reynerus aliquid in haec blasphema meditari potes consiliumque cum illo et collega atque Delffshaviense capere quid et quod ei respondendum sit."

was linked to a great many theological questions, hardly one of which was less important than the others. The ministers' rejoinder offers a panorama of debated points. They polemicized with Coornhert about the relationship between the visible and invisible churches, the apostolic origins of the church, the issue of ecclesial continuity, the marks of the true church, the correct administration of the sacraments, the elaboration of the doctrines of justification and predestination, and the interpretation of the Bible. Coornhert had initially held some of his arguments in reserve, to give his attack on the Reformed Church more brevity and punch. In the paper controversy that followed, the ecclesiological debate spread from point to point, and all related issues were brought to the table.

The ecclesiological issue that Coornhert had raised touched the Reformed Church's Achilles heel.[106] For all Protestant reformers the question of the true church was harder to answer than the question of true faith. The Reformation had brought religious divisions, but the reformers clung stubbornly to the principle of a single, undivided, universal Church. "We maintain the church universal in its unity", wrote Calvin in his *Institutes*, and he went on to add that division within the church was the work of diabolical spirits.[107] In the knowledge that the Reformed ministers in Holland, as the founders of a 'new' church, had all appearances against them, Coornhert maintained that the Reformed Church could make no claim to being the universal church of Christ. It had, before all else, broken with the *history* of the Christian Church. It was historical continuity that gave the Church legitimacy, a premise that the Reformed ministers themselves shared. [108]

In their ecclesiological thinking Coornhert and his Reformed opponents had a number of fundamental assumptions in common. Both parties distinguished a visible and an invisible church. Augustine had long ago emphasized that the visible church was a *corpus permixtum*. True believers, the elect of God, were mixed in a single community

---

[106] McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 197.

[107] "Ita et ecclesiae universali suam servamus unitatem, quam dissecare semper studuerunt diabolici spiritus." J. Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* (1559), in *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, CR 30 (Brunswick, 1864) II, 754. For an extensive elucidation of Calvin's ecclesiological thought see F. Wendel, *Calvin: sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse* (Paris, 1950), 221–242.

[108] Pelikan argues that the introduction of the "argument from continuity" in so many Reformation controversies led to an important historicization of theological thinking. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (London 1971) 39.

with sinners.[109] This visible church could not possibly be a *communio sanctorum*. The community of true believers comprised an invisible church, known only to God. [110] On this issue, Coornhert's line of thought was remarkably close to that of the ministers. Accordingly, Cornelisz in the first instance expressed irritation that Coornhert should cite the distinction between the visible and the invisible church to support far-reaching conclusions about the Reformed Church. On this point, replying to Coornhert was hardly worth the effort.[111]

Cornelisz initially identified the visible church with the invisible church. The Reformed Church had, in Cornelisz's view, developed from being the invisible church within the "Roman church" to being the visible true church. Coornhert already recognized that the true invisible church must have existed within the "Roman church", and Cornelisz wondered why he made such an issue of the fact that the true church had 'simply' come out of hiding. [112] This line of reasoning, which survives in Cornelisz's rough drafts, is not to be found in the polemic itself. There, the ministers claimed to represent the visible true church, but did not claim that their church, like the invisible true church, contained only true believers.

The relationship between the visible and the invisible church, crucial to Coornhert's argument, was more complex than Cornelisz was initially willing to admit. The ministers tried to demonstrate that the argument that Coornhert based on the relationship between the visible and invisible churches was untenable. Swiftly, however, they moved the debate to a related theme, the marks of the true visible church. The ministers sought to show that theirs was the true church on the basis of two characteristics, the teaching of doctrine and the administration of the sacraments. They preferred to link the question of continuity to the discussion of the *notae ecclesiae*, focusing on the church's present rather than its past.

Calvin's firm language, stating in line with Cyprian that there was no salvation outside the church, [113] is not to be found in the rejoinder. Cornelisz and his fellows did stand up for their church, regarding it as the body of Christ, but they had no desire to alienate the faithful still outside the church.

---

[109] McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 200.
[110] Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford, 1991), 146.
[111] *Met drie redenen* (Cornelisz ms.), GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.
[112] Ibidem.
[113] Wendel, *Calvin: sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse* , 223.

In his *Redene* Coornhert gave the impression that the task he had set himself, unmasking the Reformed Church as a sect, had been achieved in less than 2,000 words. On the basis of two quotations from Calvin's *Institutes* and a quotation from the letters of Beza, [114] Coornhert concluded that "all the churches whose teachers take the Genevan or Calvinian or Bezan teachings and writings for true doctrine, follow them and teach them to the people" were no more than sects. [115] They could lay no claim to being called 'church', as this was a name reserved to the universal community of Christian believers. Coornhert raised the issue of the visible church in a clarificatory sentence: "And because the church is visible, and also invisible, when I name both aforesaid churches [the Catholic and the Reformed, M.R.] I mean the visible congregation of the same, and by no means the invisible living stones of God's church, and true members of Christ." [116] Coornhert wanted to keep the polemic from turning into a debate about the invisible church. This community of true believers could not be localized in time or place, while Coornhert's conclusions applied very definitely to the outward church, the church in the here and now, with all the political implications that followed from it.

Coornhert's remark is, however, misleading, as the invisible church did indeed play a crucial role in his argument. Coornhert had to anticipate the (hypothetical) rejoinder of the Reformed that their (outward) church should be considered the visible continuation, in a reformed body, of the outward Catholic Church in which the invisible church had once been hidden. With two quotations from the fourth book of Calvin's *Institutes* Coornhert sought to cut off this route. According to Calvin the *visible* church was recognized by its "pure doctrine" and its "right use of the sacraments". He also claimed that from the creation of the world to its end there "was never time, nor shall be, that

---

[114] With regard to Calvin's *Institutes*, Coornhert in 1582 referred to a 1550 (Latin) edition. Coornhert, *Synodus* 1:9; Idem, *Proeve*, 44. He was presumably already using this edition in 1578. This would explain why Tilius—who was using an edition from 1559 or later—marked Coornhert's references as "male positae." Tilius to Cornelisz, [May 1577], in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling," 125. Coornhert also disposed over a 1575 edition of Beza's letters: *Epistolarum theologicarum Theodori Bezae Vezelij liber unus*, 2nd ed. (Geneva 1575). Coornhert, *Synodus* 1:8–9.

[115] Coornhert, *Redene*, 1: "alle kercken welcker leeraren den Geneefschen calvyniaenschen oft besanischen leren ende scriften voor den waren lere achten, dye navolgen ende den volcke leren."

[116] Ibidem.

God did not have his church". [117] Coornhert drew two implications from this claim: Calvin had been speaking of God's church *on earth* and furthermore in times of ecclesial decay, when the two marks cited by Calvin could not be found, this church must have been invisible. Otherwise it would be impossible to distinguish continuity. Where this invisible church could be thought to have been, there was the true church, even if it could not always be directly discerned. [118]

The consequence of Coornhert's reasoning is obvious. When Luther and Zwingli separated themselves from the "Roman church" the true church had been invisible. A *visible* true church should—as Coornhert's quotation from Calvin showed—have had pure doctrine and the correct administration of the sacraments, and this cannot have been the case. Furthermore, had a visible church been available, the Reformers would have had no need to found their own congregations. In short, there could have been no visible true church. "Nevertheless", Coornhert continued, "the invisible church of God was not absent from the world."[119] It could not have been among the Jews, nor among the heathens, which left only the Catholic Church as the visible body that had contained, invisibly, the true church of God. "So it would seem necessarily to follow that the churches of Luther and Zwingli are not churches, but no more than sects, and that the "Roman church" alone would be the true church." [120]

To reinforce the point, Coornhert gave two more reasons in support of his conclusion. The Reformed Church could not have been the true visible church, because the Reformed ministers had received no express command from God to found a church, any more than Luther or Zwingli had. Furthermore, Calvin himself had claimed that "Christ may not be scored in pieces" and "that Christ half buried was hidden

---

[117] Ibidem, 1. J. Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* (1550), in *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, CR 29 (Brunswick, 1863 I, 544: "Symbola ecclesiae dignoscendae verbi praedicationem sacramentorumque observationem posuimus." Ibidem 540: "Et quanquam rara saepius indicia eiusmodi sanctificationis exstant inter homines, statuendum tamen est, nullum fuisse ab orbe condito tempus, quo ecclesiam suam Dominus non habuerit; nullum etiam fore, ad consummationem usque saeculi, quo non sit habiturus."

[118] Coornhert, *Redene*, 1.

[119] Ibidem: "Des nyet te min [was] dye onsichtbare kercke gods nyet wter werelt."

[120] Ibidem, 1–2: "So schynt ooc nootlick te volgen dat die kercke Lutheri ende Zwingelij geen kercken en zyn, maer nyet dan secten, en dat de Roomsche kercke alleen zoude zyn die ware kercke."

in the "Roman church".[121] From this too Coornhert concluded that the Catholic Church had to be regarded as the true church of God, even though it was a "polluted" church. He compared it to a great amount of dross in which a little nugget of pure gold was still to be found. "For filth does not remove substance, but clings to it." [122]

It is noteworthy that Coornhert nowhere explicitly speaks of the true *visible* church. He does, however, refer to the true invisible church. Because this had "been within the Roman church" (*geweest zy byden Roomschen kercke*) the latter was the "true church" (*ware kercke*)[123] But was this true church in any way *visible*? In the margins of his treatise, next to the paragraph identifying the invisible church with the true church, Coornhert scribbled the phrase "united to a church visible" (*verenicht met een kercke sichtbaer*). He had also clearly stated in the introduction to the *Redene* that his argument concerned "the visible congregation".[124] The exact relationship between the true invisible church and the visible church remained hazy. Coornhert chose not to clarify it because doing so would put him in a difficult position. He regarded the "Roman church" as corrupt and had no desire to appear to be presenting this church as the true visible church. Such a course would, furthermore, have shown little sense of political opportuneness. In general Coornhert preferred to hide behind his argumentation, presenting his statements as necessary logical conclusions that imposed themselves independently, so to speak, of the author's will. [125]

The accusation that the Reformed Church could claim no historical continuity with the Church of the Apostles and that, furthermore, its ministers lacked a divine mandate, hit the Reformed clergymen on a tender spot. Coornhert gave a clear exposition of this complex problem, which made his message all the more convincing. In the rejoinder Cornelisz fully conceded that the Reformed Church had appearances against it. "Our separation that you say to be hateful and offensive,

---

[121] Ibidem, 2: "Christus nyet en mach gescoort worden in stucken"; "dat Christus half begraven zijnde schuylt inde Roomsche kercke".

[122] Ibidem, 2–3: "Want vuylheyt neemt substantie niet wech, maer cleeft daer an."

[123] Ibidem, 1.

[124] Ibidem.

[125] Coornhert formulated his central conclusion very carefully: "So *it seems* necessarily to follow that the churches of Luther and Zwingli are not churches, but no more than sects, and that the Roman church *would be* the true church." Emphasis added. Ibidem, 2.

we admit to being so, namely in that it arouses great hatred against us, and offends many unearned people."[126] Cornelisz admitted that the continuity of the Catholic Church, visible in an unbroken line of episcopal succession from the earliest Church, with apostolic origins, made it attractive to some. For some believers this was reason enough to remain in the Catholic Church and adhere to its doctrines.[127] Coornhert's reasoning, seeking to locate the church historically in an institutional continuum, would probably have been approved by many sections of the population.

In the rejoinder Cornelisz tied himself in knots to deny any validity to Coornhert's arguments and to allay as far as possible any suspicions against the Reformed Church. In an extensive letter on the Coornhert affair, Tilius had indicated what books might be useful. The day after receiving Coornhert's *Redene* Tilius had set to work in his library. Cornelisz naturally refers to the books that Coornhert himself cited in his treatise: Calvin's *Institutes* and the collected letters of Beza. Tilius also recommended Bullinger's *Decades*[128] and the *Loci communes* of both Vermigli and Musculus[129] as serviceable works for the purpose.[130]

In Protestant circles collections of *Loci communes*, commonplaces, had replaced the medieval *Summa* as theological handbooks. They systematized all sorts of theological arguments and rubricized the Bible for the reader. Such collections of biblical places could form the basis on which to build an argument.[131] Tilius remarked with satisfaction that he had gathered a "sufficiently large pile of stones" to floor "that

---

[126] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 19: "Dat ghij onse afsonderinghe hatelick ende argherlick sight te zijn, bekennen wij soo te wesen, namelick dtse teghen ons eenen grooten haet verweckt, ende maeckt dat vele onverstandighe menschen over ons verarghert zijn."

[127] Ibidem, 38–39.

[128] Heinrich Bullinger, *Sermonum decades duae. De potissimis verae religionis capitibus* (Zürich, 1549). This collection of Bullinger's sermons was already circulating in several editions by 1577; a Dutch translation had been printed in 1563.

[129] Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci communes in usus sacrae theologiae candidatorum parati* (Basel, 1560). This work had also gone through several editions by 1577; Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci Communes. Ex variis ipsius authoris libris in unum volumen collecti, & quatuor classes distributi* (London, 1576).

[130] Tilius to Cornelisz, [May 1577], in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling," 125: "Totum hanc contrivi diem legendo Calvinum de ecclesia, Musculi et Martyr locos et Bullingeri Decades de ecclesia et schismate, apud quos acervus lapidum satis magnus reperitur ad lapidandum et prosternendum hunc Philisteum incircumcisum."

[131] On the general meaning of the term *locus*: Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden, 1993), 135. Melanchthon's *Loci communes* (1521) were widely known. According to Anthony Levi this work helped prevent the disintegration of German Lutheranism around 1520.

uncircumcised Philistine" Coornhert.[132] The use of commonplaces had reached great heights in combination with innovations in dialectics in the first half of the sixteenth century.[133] In medieval propositional logic, syllogisms had been deployed to produce watertight chains of reasoning. This almost mathematical syllogistic strictness disappeared in favour of a more pragmatic dialectic, designed to convince the reader or hearer.[134] Commonplaces could help to produce coherence in an argument aimed at moving the reader.

The rejoinder applied these principles. Cornelisz used syllogisms to make important connections. He also cast Coornhert's argument into syllogistic form, in order to give a technical refutation by negating one of its premises. Cornelisz did not, however, fully develop or elaborate his syllogisms, and in the course of his argument they fade away to give room to a different style of argumentation. In this polemic Cornelisz was taking the part of the *respondens*. This gave him the task of refuting the arguments of the *opponens*, in this case Coornhert, without himself adducing new evidence.[135] Cornelisz deviated from this general position when it became clear to him that Coornhert's arguments could only be countered on technical grounds at a price that the ministers were unwilling to pay.

An example of this is the *reductio ad absurdum* that Cornelisz deployed against the argument of Coornhert's *Redene*. If Coornhert by definition linked the invisible church and the true church, then according to Cornelisz the same must apply to the idolatrous church of the Jews and even the church of the Turks, in which at times true believers might be found. Coornhert rejected this analogy. He considered his conclusion with regard to the Catholic Church as justified by the historical continuity that the invisible church had had with an uncorrupted visible church. This link between the two churches lay, *inter*

Anthony Levi, *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven, 2002), 283–284.

[132] Tilius to Cornelisz, [May 1577], in Van Schelven, "Briefwisseling," 125: "Philisteum incircumcisum".

[133] Evans links the *loci* to medieval and early modern thinking on the *topoi*: Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 18–29. Rudolf Agricola, in particular, gave the *topoi* a prominent position in his influential handbook of dialectic, *De inventione dialectica* (1515). Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 130–167.

[134] Lisa Jardine, "Humanistic Logic", in *CHRP*, 175–176.

[135] Graham White, *Luther as a Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of their Medieval Background*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 30 (Helsinki, 1994), 21.

alia, in the substance of baptism, in the Apostolic creed and in belief in the Holy Trinity.[136] To maintain his own argument, Cornelisz saw himself forced into an absolute divorce between the Reformed Church and the Catholic Church. Ultimately this was unsustainable. He had to acknowledge that the Catholic Church had a number of points in common with the Reformed Church. It was a "visibly decayed and erring church of God" (*sichtbare vervallene ende vervalschte kercke Godts*) and the Catholic faithful had to be counted as Christians "because they are baptized in the name of Christ and outwardly profess the name of Christ."[137]

Cornelisz's moderation stands in sharp contrast to the resolute forcefulness with which Coornhert seeks to unmask the Reformed Church as a sect. In imitation of the Apostle Paul, Cornelisz had no desire to exacerbate dogmatic conflict within his own church. He preached "Christian modesty and mutual forbearance" (*christelicke bescheijdenheijt ende onderlinghe verduldicheijt*) so that controversies should not give occasion for further divisions. It is clear that Cornelisz was trying to get as many believers as possible into the Reformed Church by advocating a certain flexibility, but by basing his argument on the question of historical continuity Coornhert had provided a difficult point of entry. The *reductio ad absurdum* ran aground on the everyday practicalities that Cornelisz had to take into consideration in trying to hold the doors of his church open to large numbers of formerly Catholic churchgoers. Because Cornelisz could not find an adequate refutation of Coornhert's argument, he chose to press on past the issue and shift the *status quaestionis* of the debate. The Reformed Church preached true doctrine and administered the sacraments in rightful fashion. In other words: it was a visible true church. The onus was on Coornhert to prove the opposite.

The turn that the polemic had taken was not, however, to Coornhert's disliking. He allowed himself to be drawn into a debate about doctrine and sacraments, but consistently linked these issues to the problem of ecclesial disunity. Time and again he accused Cornelisz of having sacrificed ecclesial unity to doctrinal purity and outward ritual. In view of these accusations any attempt by Cornelisz to present the Reformed

---

[136] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 6.

[137] Ibidem, 8: "om datse inden name Christi ghedoopt zijn ende den naeme Christi wterlick belijden".

Church constructively as the true visible church was doomed to failure. Cornelisz was stranded if he relied on logic alone, so much was clear. The force of Cornelisz's argument lay more in the rhetorical style of the rejoinder, which besides *docere* relied heavily on *movere*. The appeal was not only to the reader's intellect, but primarily to his emotions, the arousing of which was to move him to assent to the conclusions.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the greatest importance was attributed to *elocutio*, in classical rhetoric the stage of delivery of an argument. An effective presentation of arguments always took account of the public to be reached. The art of eloquence was first of all a question of practical *savoir-faire*. Melanchthon, whose rhetorical views found wide support, regarded an appeal to emotion as necessary to bring the reader to the good. [138] As an academic discipline, rhetoric had become a handmaid of theology, so that divine truths conveyed by the spoken or written word would be *convincing*.

In the rejoinder Cornelisz continually plays on sentiment. In this way he hoped not only to make his readers receptive to his negative judgement of Coornhert, but also to make them less receptive to criticisms of the Reformed Church. He tried to label Coornhert as a suspect Catholic. Given the continual threat of war, such slurs were bound to resonate. Cornelisz also appealed to his readers' sense of justice by presenting the very first Protestant reformers, Luther and Zwingli, as heroes of orthodoxy. Who would dare object to the manner in which these men had denounced the serious errors of the Catholic Church?

In the rejoinder, Cornelisz launched a personal attack on Coornhert. "So we say that your words give us no little suspicion of guile on your part", he wrote. [139] On the one hand Coornhert considered it proven that the Catholic Church was the true church, while on the other he denied that it was a true *visible* church. Coornhert did not even consider himself to have made any assertion about the Catholic Church as visible church. To Cornelisz he asserted: "If you should speak of the visible church, one might hear something different." [140] It is clear that with the political-religious circumstances in mind, Coornhert was

---

[138] Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 281–283.

[139] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 8: "Soo segghen wij dat uwe woorden ons gheen cleijn achterdencken van archlisticheijt teghen u gheven."

[140] Ibidem: "Indien ghij vande sichtbare kercke soudet spreecken, datmen mueghelick wat anders vernemen soude."

keeping options open, which Cornelisz interpreted as equivocation. "We think this thing very wrong, that you, without revealing your own opinion, would assert to us that the "Roman church" would appear to be the true visible church, which you do not yourself believe, and so in your own opinion, that which you maintain against us is no more than seeming truth, but not the truth itself." [141]

Cornelisz tried to present Coornhert's manner of argumentation in a bad light by comparing him to the Sophists "who by their art and subtlety would prove in all likelihood that white is black." [142] Cornelisz also capitalized on the image of the untrustworthy Catholic. He ascribed a pro-Catholic position to his opponent, which in political terms branded Coornhert a suspect individual. Although it is hard to deny that Coornhert's view of the Catholic Church of his own times is opaque, Cornelisz showed a certain obstreperousness in discounting the crucial distinction in Coornhert's argument between 'true church' and 'true visible church'.

Coornhert was quite clear in rejecting the Catholic Church as the true visible church. Cornelisz quotes Coornhert as follows: "Firstly you say, that you would not and could not demonstrate, that the Roman church has pure doctrine and the right use of the sacraments, but that you could soon powerfully demonstrate that the Roman church is not the true, indeed that it cannot be taken for a church." [143] This did not take away from the fact that Coornhert saw the true church—although for the time invisible—as historically anchored in the Catholic Church. In his attempt to discredit Coornhert, Cornelisz had lost sight of everything except the clear asymmetry that he saw in Coornhert's reasoning. The argumentation in the *Redene* concluded in a fierce condemnation of the Reformed Church as a sect, while the Catholic Church—despite Coornhert's view of its as at least as corrupt—came out looking like

---

[141] Ibidem: "Ons dunckt dit een heel verkeerde saecke te zijn, dat ghij, sonder u ghevoelen te openbaren, teghen ons beweeren wilt dat de Roomschen kercke de ware sichtbare kercke schijnt te zijn, twelck ghij selfs niet en ghelooft, ende also is na u eijghen ghevoelen, tghene dat ghij teghen ons sustineert, niet dan der waerheijt ghelijck, maer niet de waerheijt selve."

[142] Ibidem: "[…] die door haer conste ende subtijlheijt waerschijnlick willen proberen dat wit swart is."

[143] Ibidem, 18–19: "Ten eersten seght ghij, dat ghij niet en wilt noch condt bewijsen, dat de Roomsche kercke de suijvere leere ende trechte ghebruijck der sacramenten heeft, maer dat ghij eer crachtelick soudt connen bewijsen dat de Roomsche kercke de warachtighe niet en is, ia datse niet en mach voor een kercke ghehouden wesen."

the true church. Cornelisz had, however, carefully defused the issue of continuity, which lay at the heart of this ecclesiological debate.

Cornelisz naturally had to give a historical view of the legitimacy of the Reformed Church. To do so he turned to a question that was closely related to the ecclesiological debate. Rather than put any energy into unravelling the complicated relationship between the visible and the invisible church, Cornelisz tried to gain his readers' approval for a historical vision in which direct divine intervention legitimized the actions of Protestant reformers. Luther and Zwingli had been called by God to fulfil their tasks.[144]

He presented the Reformation as a battle between good and evil. Who would dare to claim that criticism of the corrupt Catholic Church was improper? He also sought confirmation of the legitimacy of the Reformation, and with it of ecclesial separation, in the course of history. It had not taken long before Luther and Zwingli received the support of the temporal authorities. This development was also part of a divine plan. Where Coornhert had turned to abstract arguments aimed at "proofs" of an intangible ecclesiological continuum, Cornelisz presented sacred history as divinely directed human activity. [145]

According to Coornhert, Luther and Zwingli had lacked a divine commission to found a new church or to reform the old church. Cornelisz regarded himself as a reformer, but agreed that in certain respects the Reformation had brought innovation. As an example he gave the doctrine of *sola gratia*. Ideas such as this only seemed new, however, because people had been so long misled. [146] Cornelisz pre-

---

[144] Ibidem, 12–13; Cornelisz, *Velitatio*, 21–22: "Quod si non possit probare esse novam, & rogatur fateri esse veterem: tum porro videbimus an & quatenus liceat veterem Ecclesiam collapsam instaurare atque reformare & an Lutherus & Zwinglius vocationem a Deo ad id faciundum habuerint."

[145] Ibidem, 25–27: "Cepit primum anno 1517 Lutherus quum erat Ecclesiae Papisticae doctor doctrinam Papisticam de indulgentiis falsitatis et mendacii reprehendere ex sacrarum litterarum auctoritate [. ..]. Sed ipse excommunicatus a Papa, a Christo in propinquiorem familiaritatem receptus est, inquam veritatis cognitione maiores profectus fecit. Cuius etiam laboribus ita benedicit Deus ut Saxoniae dux legitimus illic loci magistratus veritatis cognitionem adoptatus atque amplexus Lutherum ne in manus tyrannorum incidat tuendum recipiat [. ..]. Idem quoque fuit initium et progressus eiusdem in Helvetia circa idem tempus [. ..]. Iterum, in puram et Catholicam Ecclesiam reduxerunt praedicantes fidem illam antiquam Romanam, quae per totum mundum tempore Pauli celebrabatur [. ..]."

[146] Ibidem, 22: "Fatemur igitur novam nostram Ecclesiam dici aliquo modo posse quatenus nimirum hominibus iam longo tempore seductis nova est."

sented the Reformation as an inevitable process that was only a break in the continuity of the church to the extent that Luther and Zwingli had brought the faithful back to the right path. It is clear that for Cornelisz the process of ecclesial reformation was still ongoing. The *Velitatio* shows that the Reformed ministers put themselves in the tradition of Luther and Zwingli. They regarded the various reformed churches as parts of one and the same movement of reformation which would end in renewed unity within a universal church. [147]

Cornelisz suggested to his readers that they were living through the times in which the church had been saved, as it was "but 60 years past that the Lord raised up blessed, learned and bold-hearted men from the midst of popery itself to make known the shame of Antichrist, teach the rightful gospel of J. Christ, and call the people to knowledge of the truth." [148] Cornelisz would only have succeeded in his mission when Coornhert was unmasked as an enemy of the fruition of this pivotal age in sacred history.

The ministers' rejoinder had still not been sent in February 1578. Coornhert, his patience at an end, travelled to Delft to enforce what he took to be the promise Tilius had made him in writing: that it would be possible to discuss the issue in person. [149] Cornelisz again showed himself less enthusiastic than his fellow minister Tilius, who should be considered the driving force behind the religious disputation soon to be held in Leiden. In the rejoinder Cornelisz looks forward with a heavy heart to the oral exchange that in the meantime seems to have been agreed on with Coornhert:

> We see from this that what we had heard of your hastiness and impatience in disputation is no more than the truth, which was why we were so slow to agree to deal with you by mouth, and now also having agreed thereunto have no great hope that it will proceed very edifyingly. For if such insults and slander against our doctrine, still not won from falseness, can flow from your pen, what can we expect of your tongue, when you yourself write that the tongue is a readier tool than the pen? [150]

---

[147] Ibidem, 27: "In puram et Catholicam Ecclesiam reduxerunt praedicantes fidem illam antiquam Romanam."

[148] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 13: "Maer over 60 iaren heeft de Heere godtsalighe, gheleerde ende vroomhertighe mannen wt het midden des pausdoms selfs doen op staen dewelcke de schande des antechrists ontdeckt, het evangelium J. Christi recht gheleert, ende de menschen tot de kennisse der waerheijt gheroepen hebben."

[149] Ibidem.

[150] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 41–42: "Wij sien hier wt wel, dat het niet al buijten de waerheijt is, twelck ons wel ten ooren is ghecomen, van uwe haesticheijt ende onver-

In the course of the disputations in Delft and Leiden, the minister would see how right he was.

Debate in Delft

The discussions in Delft flowed directly from the written controversy between Tilius and Coornhert, to which Cornelisz and Donteclock had in the meantime made substantial contributions. Nevertheless, it was Tilius who had sought the confrontation. His written reaction to Coornhert's *Redene* had closed with the statement that he ("with those who have assisted me") was ready to continue the debate face to face, should it be desired and a suitable time be found. [151] Coornhert responded quickly, but the written polemic then risked reaching an impasse. Cornelisz and Donteclock were to have written a rejoinder, but they dragged their feet. On a false pretext (or might it have been a genuine misunderstanding?) [152] Coornhert travelled to Delft in mid-February 1578 to ensure that Tilius made good on his promise. Tilius, however, referred him to Cornelisz and Donteclock, who presented their unexpected guest with two options. Coornhert could either wait for the ministers' rejoinder, in which they would set a date for the debate, or he could be given a date directly. The impetuous Coornhert took the second option. [153]

On 24 February 1578 Coornhert again arrived in Delft.[154] He entered into negotiations with the ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock concerning the debate that was to begin the following day in a "privy place"

---

duldicheijt int tsamenspreecken, waer door wi ooc soo traghelick bewillicht hebben om met u mondelick te handelen, ende nu oock na dat in sulcks hebben bewillicht gheen groote hope en hebben dat het seer stichtelickende bescheijdelick sal toegaen. Want indien wt uwe penne soodanighe scheldinghen ende lasterwoorden vloeijen teghen onse leere, die noch niet van valscheijt overwonnen en is, wat hebben wij te verwachten van uwe tonghe, dewijle ghij selfs schrijft, dat de tonghe veel ghereeder ghereetschap is dan de penne."

[151] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [6r]; Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 4.

[152] As an excuse for his arrival in Delft, Coornhert claimed to have received a note from the Haarlem minister Basius ("doctor Basius"), saying that the ministers in Delft would gladly see the controversy with Coornhert brought to a close. Coornhert had interpreted this as a clear call to disputation. The ministers firmly denied having asked Basius to encourage Coornhert to come to Delft. Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [10r].

[153] Ibidem; Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 5.

[154] Unaccountably, and despite the agreements with the ministers, Coornhert appears to have mistaken the date on which the disputation was to start. A reminder

in the town.[155] The commissioners at the Leiden disputation would later refer to the debate in Delft as a "colloquy" (*tsamensprekinghe*).[156] The Court of Holland used the term "disputation" (*disputatie*).[157] The debate was a public event to the extent that each side was allowed to invite up to twelve auditors. There would have been no trouble finding more, as there was lively interest in the debate in Delft.[158] The meeting in Delft cannot be regarded as a 'political disputation', as the authorities were in no way involved. It was for this very reason that the States intervened. In the early afternoon of 25 February 1578, the procurator general of the Court of Holland made his appearance, ordering the immediate cessation of the proceedings. [159] The Court had acted at the instance of the States.[160] Presumably regents of Delft had notified the States of the religious disputation as a possible danger to the public peace. The Court's official order to the procurator general suggests as much. The prohibition was to be pronounced to the disputants in the presence of the sheriff of Delft and a number of members of the town council.[161]

The procurator general's arrival in Delft indicates that the written controversy between the ministers and Coornhert that preceded the

---

from Tilius prevented him from leaving Haarlem several days too early. Coornhert to Tilius, 20 February 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[155] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [10v].

[156] Ibidem.

[157] Commission of the Court of Holland to the procurator general, 25 February 1577 (sc. 1578), NA, Archief Hof van Holland (HvH), inv. no. 4593. For a transcription see *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 70–71.

[158] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [10r]–[10v].

[159] NA, HvH, inv. no. 4593.

[160] The acts of the States are missing for the period from 2 September 1577 to 21 August 1578. The reconstruction by J. H. W. Unger, based on the minutes of Rotterdam town council from this period, indicates that the States decided on 5 February to send the procurator general to put a stop to the debate in Delft. They also decided that Coornhert should be prohibited from publishing books without prior permission from the States. J. H. W. Unger, "De resolutiën van de Staten van Holland van 1577 en 1578," *BMHG* 14 (1893), 1–68: 43. According to Becker the dating to 5 February cannot be right and this should be 25 February. *Bronnen*, 71.

[161] "As the Court of Holland has been informed with certainty that one Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhart has taken it upon himself publicly to dispute with the preachers within the town (of Delft), and that they are to do so this day […], the aforesaid Court […] has given commission [. ..] to the procurator general [. ..] on behalf of His Majesty solemnly to communicate to the said preachers and Dirck Volckertsz., in the presence of the sheriff and certain of the government of Delft, the interdiction of the aforesaid disputation [. ..].[*Alsoe 't Hoff van Hollant in 't seker onderricht es, dat eenen Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhart hem vervorderen soude, openbairlick binnen der steede (van Delft) met den predicanten aldaer te disputeeren, ende dat zy op huyden*

debate in Delft had already caused a certain commotion. The States justified their decision as follows: "noting that suchlike disputations tend to scandalization and disquiet of the commonalty; that therefore suchlike public disputations should not be tolerated without prior consent of the Court aforesaid or the States of the county." [162] The intervention of the States should be seen as motivated by a concern for public order, rather than by a principled objection to disputations as such. Just a few days later, the government was willing to give its permission for a new debate. The States feared that the Coornhert affair could ignite the dissatisfaction with the country's religious settlement that had smouldered for years among a large portion of the population. A religious disputation without government supervision would be far too dangerous.

Although the debate in Delft barely got off the ground and no record of the discussion has survived (if any was ever made), there are two reasons for examining the course of events in Delft more closely. Firstly, it reveals the attitude towards disputation adopted by the States; and secondly, the discussions in Delft contained the seed of the later failure of the Leiden disputation. The records of the Leiden disputation show that the debate in Delft was a continual point of reference.[163]

The discussions in Delft were difficult from the start, as a consequence of the difference of opinion about the grounds for the debate that became apparent during the preliminary discussions the day before the debate began. The ministers alleged that it had already been agreed at an earlier stage, when the date for the meeting had been set, that discussions were to treat a series of theological topics. They listed the visible church (including "the mandate [*sendinge*] of ministers"), the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of free will. The doctrine of predestination could possibly have been considered next. [164] These themes were, the ministers said, to be treated "generally" [*generalijck*]. They thought that Coornhert had consented to this proposal by his

---

in't werck souden treeden [. . .], soe is't dat t' voors. Hoff […] gecommitteerd heeft […] den procureur-generael […] die voors. predicanten ende Dirck Volckertsz. van Co. Ma ts. weegens ter presentie van den schout ende eenigen van de regierders in Delft wel ernstlick t'interdiceren die voors. disputatien]" NA, HvH, inv. no. 4593.

[162] Ibidem: "gemerckt soedaenige disputatiën niet en behoeren getollereert te werden sonder voorgaende consent van den voors. Hove ofte die Staten van de lande".

[163] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [6v]–[21r].

[164] Ibidem, [10r].

silence.[165] In Delft, according to the ministers, a "general" debate had been initiated concerning the marks of the true church.

Coornhert's interpretation was different. He would never have agreed to the ministers' proposal. He thought the themes that they proposed too far removed from the written controversy between him and Tilius, which their face-to-face meeting was intended to resolve. [166] In the written exchange Coornhert had tried to show that all churches that based their doctrine on the writings of Calvin and Beza were not true churches, but preachers of false doctrine. Such an issue would have brought the Delft disputation, and later that in Leiden, much closer to home. Coornhert claimed that the ministers had agreed to answer "to what I would present to them from the writings of Calvin and Beza."[167] When it came to it, they showed their real intention. For the duration of a whole morning, in Coornhert's reading of events, the ministers had assumed the mien of interrogators and tried to get him to answer whatever questions they chose to bring up. [168]

The difference of opinion concerning the "footing, form and manner" (*voet, forme ende maniere*) of the disputation in Delft devolved in the preliminary talks for the Leiden disputation into a round of assertions and denials about who had agreed to what. This was a crucial issue, as the disputation in Leiden was supposed to continue where the Delft debate left off. In the absence of any record of the debate, what actually did happen in Delft remains unclear.[169] What is clear is that opinions differed as to the grounds of the debate and that relations between the parties had already been aggravated. This worked through in the Leiden disputation and ultimately ensured its failure.

Coornhert cherished a strong antipathy towards Cornelisz and Donteclock, coming to view them as "unripe grapes [. . .] sour and unfriendly" during his exchanges with them in Delft.[170] The ministers'

---

[165] Ibidem, [11r]–[11v].

[166] Ibidem, [13r].

[167] Ibidem, [6v]: "[. . .] opt gene ick henluyden voorwerpen soude wten schriften Calvini ende Bese". This might be a retrospective argument. In the Leiden disputation Coornhert was explicitly prohibited from citing the works of Calvin and Beza.

[168] Ibidem.

[169] According to Coornhert the ministers themselves took notes at the time, altering them afterwards at their pleasure. He had himself not been allowed to keep a record. Coornhert to Cornelisz and Donteclock, 26 February 1578, in Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [7r].

[170] Ibidem: "onrijpe druyven [. . .] zuyr ende onvriendelijck".

view of Coornhert will have been just as harsh, which boded ill for future meetings.

Leiden Academy and Beyond

It is surprising how little trouble it took Cornelisz and Donteclock to convince the States to allow a continuation of the Delft debate. The manner in which the intended disputation in Leiden was to proceed was also decided quickly. In practice, however, the plans had to be altered in more than one respect. Between 27 February 1578, the day that the States granted their permission, and 6 April following, the day that the Leiden debate began, an important shift had occurred. During the preliminary phase, the character of the intended debate was transformed from an academic to a political disputation. The States revoked their decision to farm out the organization of the debate to Leiden University (in consultation with the ministers of Delft). The maintenance of public order required the government's more direct involvement. The States thought they had reason enough to take control of the Coornhert affair.

"Nevertheless the aforesaid States have well understood the reasons why the same dispute should be continued", was how the States phrased their decision on 27 February 1578, two days after the disputation in Delft had been suppressed, to allow a continuation of the exchange.[171] They did so on condition that such a debate should take place "in public academy or school." [172] When permission was asked in advance, and a degree of government control was possible, the States were willing to help organize a religious disputation. They generously gave Cornelisz and Donteclock, in response to their petition, an opportunity to defend their cause and strengthen the position of the public church.

---

[171] Petition from Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland, 26 or 27 February 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45: "Nochtans die Staten voorn. wel hebben cunnen verstaen die redenen waeromme inde zelve dispute vorder behoort getreden te worden". The response of the States is noted in the margin, with the date 27 February 1578. For a transcript, see Jaanus, *Hervormd Delft*, 180–181. For the resolution of the States, see Unger, "De resolutiën van de Staten", 64.

[172] Ibidem: "in publycke academie ofte schole".

A religious disputation would, the States hoped, moderate Coornhert's tone, which would in turn advance the cause of civil peace. This was all the more important now that the new governor general, Don Juan, was driving a coach and horses through the Pacification of Ghent. The resumption of (civil) war was becoming inevitable.[173] The States also took into account the possibility that the debate could have unintentioned consequences for public order. They went to work carefully. In February 1578 the time was in any case not ripe for a 'political disputation' that would give the authorities the occasion expressly to legitimate the Reformed Church as the public church. If the States were to put their full political weight behind organizing a disputation, they would increase the incendiary risk already inherent in such a debate. For the sake of public order, the discussions to be held in Leiden would have to be on a small scale.

Because the Pacification of Ghent in 1576 had not provided for a definitive religious settlement, the Reformed Church's monopoly on public worship in Holland could still be presented as a provisional maintenance of the *status quo*.[174] The religious policy of the States in these years consisted of a series of public order measures. In the mean time, however, the Reformed Church was assured of the unequivocal support of the authorities. The States kept out of religious controversies, since doing otherwise would alienate those segments of the population not affiliated to the Reformed. With this in mind the States must, in February 1578, have thought it unwise to involve themselves too directly in the organization of a religious disputation between the ministers and Coornhert. They even considered the role of impartial arbitrator too risky.

The position of the States was formulated in response to the petition whereby Cornelisz and Donteclock requested permission to continue the debate. The ministers justified their request by referring to the flood of rumours that followed the prohibition in Delft. There were "suspicions and presumptions" that the procurator general had acted at the instigation of the ministers, as a way for them to "escape" the debate.[175] It is no surprise that Coornhert also spoke of a clear admis-

---

[173] Woltjer, "De vredemakers", 76–81; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 194.

[174] Anton van der Lem, *De Opstand in de Nederlanden (1555–1609)* (Utrecht 1995) 94–96.

[175] Petition from Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland, 26 or 27 February 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

sion of weakness. He was among those who presumed that Cornelisz and Donteclock had wanted to get out of the debate by calling in the help of the secular authorities.[176] It is unlikely that was really the case, as the ministers—admittedly some more than others—were actually in favour of religious disputation. The efforts of Cornelisz and Donteclock to get the States to continue the Delft debate seem to confirm this desire. According to Coornhert, however, they were acting only to salvage their damaged reputations.

The day after the Delft debate was stopped, the ministers and Coornhert encountered one another on the market place in Delft and an exchange ensued "worthy of turf-carriers" Coornhert vented his suspicions of the ministers and spoke of them fleeing to the arms of the States. Shortly beforehand Coornhert had put the same allegations down in writing in a strong letter to the ministers. [177] He touched the ministers on an exceptionally sensitive spot with the remark that he would happily accept any explanations the ministers might provide, but that the common people would probably judge matters differently.[178] According to the ministers these were indeed "dangerous times" in which it was necessary to bring the people "to knowledge of the truth".[179] Few would give them the benefit of the doubt, that much they must have known. Coornhert now openly challenged the ministers to continue the debate, "either before the authorities, or alone" and closed his tirade with a gesture to Delft town hall: "Have me summoned there, I will come to you." [180]

It was within two days of this that Cornelisz and Donteclock presented their petition to the States. The close ties between church and government can be seen from the fact that the States replied by return. The ministers were given permission to organize a religious disputation, which, to ensure "good order" they were to do in consultation with the professors of Leiden. The States further specified that the Delft debate was to be resumed a week later, on 6 March 1578, at the

---

[176] Coornhert to Cornelisz and Donteclock, 26 February 1578, in Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [7v].

[177] Ibidem, [6v]–[8r].

[178] Ibidem, [7v].

[179] Petition from Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland, 26 or 27 February 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[180] Coornhert to Cornelisz and Donteclock, 26 February 1578, in Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [7r]–[7v]; Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [8r].

University of Leiden.[181] The States thereby shifted responsibility for the debate on to the university. The States nevertheless made a clear distinction between the "*private*" disputation that had taken place in Delft, and the debate in Leiden that was to be held in a "*public* academy or school".[182] The States were directly involved in governing the university, whose fate had from the very beginning been tied to political and religious developments in Holland.[183] A religious disputation at the Leiden Academy would take place within the sphere of influence of the States, but at a suitable distance from the government itself.

Although at its foundation the University of Leiden was not explicitly a Reformed institution,[184] and religious tests were to be abolished as early as March 1578,[185] the university and the Reformed Church were plainly intertwined in the Faculty of Theology. In 1575 the *predikant* Caspar Coolhaes was appointed professor, after which a series of his fellow ministers would follow. Coornhert saw this as reason enough to identify the university with the Reformed cause. During the debate in Leiden he even drew a comparison with Leuven as a bastion of Roman Catholic doctrine.[186] Coornhert's response to the proposals of the States was far from warm. His suspicion must have been strengthened by the undisguised cooperation of university, States and ministers in organizing the disputation in Leiden. Coornhert worried that he would find himself not at a rostrum but in the dock. The stakes being played for were also much higher now that the States were involved, and Coornhert initially refused to cooperate with the plan put forward by the States.

In his account of the religious disputation in Leiden, Coornhert gives the impression that a decision was taken at the end of February to continue the disputation on 6 April. He fails to mention that the resumption of the debate was initially set for 6 March, and was delayed

---

[181] Petition from Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland, 26 or 27 February 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[182] Ibidem.

[183] Henrike Clotz, *Eine Hochschule in Holland: Die Universität Leiden im Spannungsfeld van Provinz, Stadt und Kirche, 1575–1619* (Stuttgart, 1998) 28–29; Otterspeer, *Groepsportret* I, 75.

[184] J. J. Woltjer, *De Leidse universiteit in verleden en heden* (Leiden, 1965), 9. Otterspeer, *Groepsportret* I, 138–140.

[185] H. Wansink, *Politieke wetenschappen aan de Leidse Universiteit, 1575–±1650* (Utrecht, 1981), 14.

[186] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [13r].

for a month by his own procrastination. [187] On 3 March 1578 the magistrates of Haarlem, on behalf of the States, informed him that the disputation was to be resumed in Leiden three days later. Coornhert's reaction was angry and dismissive. He was not to be summoned like a liveried servant. [188] Coornhert did not, however, communicate his objections directly to the States. He could not allow his recalcitrance to seem a snub to the power of the States. Instead he wrote no fewer than three letters to Tilius. [189] Coornhert had come to regard Cornelisz and Donteclock, whom he refers to in these letters as "thorny and sour folk" as unworthy and undesirable partners in debate. To Tilius, on the other hand, he attributed "ripe politeness". [190]

Coornhert made it clear to Tilius that he had no intention of appearing in the academy in Leiden on 6 March, and detailed all his grievances to the minister. He denounced the short notice given. His work as a notary would not allow him to go out of town at only three days' notice. Coornhert also criticized the lack of financial compensation for loss of income during his "enforced" absence. [191] In this regard Coornhert raised a fundamental inequality between the ministers and himself. As servants of the public church the ministers were paid from public funds. This complaint suggests that Coornhert saw the States as already favouring the ministers, but in his letters to Tilius he does not say so outright.

Coornhert sought Tilius's support to overcome the reluctance of the States to fix a new date for the Leiden disputation. He asked Tilius to consult with Cornelisz and Donteclock to find a suitable day after Easter, and urged the minister to communicate the date to him at least four or five days beforehand.[192] Coornhert's repeated requests to Tilius were in vain. The minister refused to cooperate with Coornhert's

---

[187] Ibidem, [8v].

[188] Coornhert to Tilius, 3 March 1577 [=1578], GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 43. Coornhert dated this letter according to the so-called *stilus Harlemensis*, in which the new year begins on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation (hence also known as Annunciation style). This dating had been in use in Haarlem since 1483. See R. Fruin, *Handboek der chronologie voornamelijk van Nederland* (Alphen, 1934), 99–100.

[189] Ibidem; Coornhert to Tilius, 11 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45; Coornhert to Tilius, 15 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[190] Coornhert to Tilius, 3 March 1577 [1578], GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 43.

[191] Ibidem. Coornhert expressed the same complaints in the letters of 11 and 15 March 1578.

[192] Ibidem.

manoeuvres in any way. The organization of the disputation in Leiden was in any case entirely out of his hands, as Coornhert appears to have been aware. Time and again Coornhert expressed his disappointment with the role Tilius's "brothers" had assumed in the debate.

It is remarkable, to say the least, that in the first half of March Coornhert thrice addressed himself to Tilius, whose involvement now was at most behind the scenes. One of the things that it reveals is the extent of Coornhert's antipathy towards Cornelisz and Donteclock. More important in my eyes, however, is the strategic importance of the letters to Tilius. Coornhert tried to find support for a return to the initial terms of debate, namely a discussion of the treatise that he had sent to Tilius in February 1577.[193] On 11 March 1578 he wrote to Tilius "without concealment" that he intended "to combat the Calvinian or Bezan or Genevan opinions [. . .] with firm and authentic proofs."[194]

Tilius must have informed the States of Coornhert's unwillingness to accept their summons to a disputation in Leiden on 6 March. Although this was a form of disobedience to the authorities, the States avoided confronting Coornhert. To save their own face and at the same time to give Coornhert an excuse, the States wrote to the professors and regents (the latter a group comprising mayors and curators) of Leiden University that it had never been their intention to have the debate start on 6 March 1578. That was only the day on which the "day and form" of the coming discussions should be agreed. [195] By this means the States took the pressure off for the moment. The professors were then instructed to postpone the disputation for a week. [196] It was still up to them, in consultation with the ministers, to fix a date and format for the debate.

The States did not dare openly call Coornhert to order or meet his criticism. This kid-glove approach makes one suspect that there was already considerable public interest in the approaching disputation.

---

[193] Coornhert, *Redene*.

[194] Coornhert to Tilius, 11 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45: "[. . .] dye calviniaensche ofte besanische ofte Geneefsche opinion aen te vechten [. . .] met vaste ende beschedelicke bewysinghen". In his letter Coornhert distinguished a series of subordinate themes, encapsulating them in theses. Thus he proposed that the "followers" of Calvin and Beza wrongfully represented themselves as teachers of the congregation, that they gave no credence to the Word of God, that they proclaimed false doctrine, that their churches were false churches and that they prayed to God in an insincere manner.

[195] UBL, Archives of senate and faculties (A.S.F.), inv. no. 280, fo. 70r.

[196] Ibidem.

The conciliatory approach that the States took towards Coornhert must have sprung from a desire to avoid any occasion for disturbances. The letter that the States directed to the University was the first occasion on which the States betrayed a close involvement in the debate. It was no longer presented as a project of the ministers, for which the States had simply given permission. On the contrary, the disputation was to serve the common good and Coornhert should not be given any pretext to withdraw. Hence the insistence on delay, "not to precipitate parties or to give grounds for any subterfuge or excuse by the shortness of the time." [197]

Whether the Leiden professors actually did set a new date for the disputation is an open question. In his letters to Tilius, Coornhert stuck to the official date of 6 March. Tilius also seems to have counted on that being the day that the disputation was to start. In a letter to Coornhert he expresses his amazement at the course of events, to which his correspondent replied cryptically that it was a result of "ignorance of affairs, that time will make known".[198] The States presumably negotiated with Coornhert separately to arrange a new date, perhaps with the mediation of a friendly member of the States or civic regent. By 15 March, in any case, it had been determined that the disputation was to begin on 6 April. The States requested the magistracies of both Delft and Haarlem to give the parties official notification of the new date.[199] The magistrates themselves were ordered to do their utmost to advance the disputation.

In retrospect, the letter from the States to the professors and governors of the University of Leiden was the first step towards a disputation in which the university played no meaningful role. [200] Coornhert's refusal to conform to the original instructions made it clear to the government that they should retain close control of such a risky enterprise. In a memorandum directed to the mayors of Haarlem to be

---

[197] Ibidem: "[…] omme partijen nyet te precipiteren ofte oorsaecke te geven deur de cortheyt vande tyt eenige subterfuige ofte uytvluchte te maecken".

[198] Coornhert to Tilius, 11 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45. Tilius's letter does not survive.

[199] The States of Holland to the town council of Delft, 15 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45; Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [8v], provides a transcription of the letter from the States to the city council of Haarlem. Coornhert was, he says himself, in possession of a "copie auctentijck."

[200] The order from the States to the city council of Haarlem does not even mention the university.

forwarded to the assembly of the States, Coornhert briefly reviewed his complaints. At the same time this document, like his letters to Tilius, expressed Coornhert's determination, in spite of all injustices, to take part in the disputation. [201] The self-confidence with which Coornhert addressed the States must have reinforced the conviction of the States that the disputation could only succeed if directed by a strong political authority. The assumption must have been that Leiden's professors would not be able to restrain Coornhert. The decision of the States to make a new start on the disputation on 6 April probably coincided with the appointment of two commissioners with responsibility for preparing the debate.[202]

In the mean time, Coornhert showed no inclination to refrain from attacking the ministers in the aftermath of the Delft debacle. On 21 March 1578 Coornhert received a long letter from Cornelisz and Donteclock.[203] He described this epistle as a response (Coornhert spoke rather dismissively of an appendix) to the angry letter he had written to the ministers shortly after the end of the disputation in Delft.[204] According to Coornhert, Cornelisz and Donteclock only rehashed old arguments, but his reaction also reveals that the ministers had not been put off by Coornhert's attempts—via Tilius—to turn the page on the issues raised in Delft. The ministers returned to the difference of opinion concerning the *status quaestionis* that had arisen during the meeting in Delft. To prevent any misunderstanding they had set out in their letter how they saw the *status*. In total the ministers distinguished nineteen subordinate questions, which they arranged under three main headings, namely the outward church, justification, and free will.[205]

The disagreement about the *status quaestionis* was still a live issue. Coornhert complained to Tilius that the ministers had not been willing to respond to his critical remarks on the teachings of Calvin and Beza, which he regarded as the *status quaestionis*.[206] In his turn he dismissed

---

[201] Memo from Coornhert to the mayors of Haarlem, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[202] The formal assignment of terms of reference to these commissioners does not survive. It is for this reason that the institution of the ad hoc commission for the religious disputation in Leiden cannot be dated with certainty.

[203] This letter has been lost. The contents can be conjectured from the acts of the Leiden disputation.

[204] Coornhert to Cornelisz and Donteclock, 22 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[205] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [12r]–[12v].

[206] Coornhert to Tilius, 15 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

the letter of Cornelisz and Donteclock, in which they elucidated their understanding of the *status quaestionis*, with the bittersweet remark that he "had nothing more glorious to do on earth, than [. ..] to go to Leiden devoutly there to deal with ministers from Delft."[207] Coornhert simply ignored the substance of the letter.

After 15 March the disputation was gradually given a *public* format. The public nature of the meeting reflected the extent of interest in the debate. It would be a misunderstanding to think that the ministers had from the start been aiming for a public debate. At least, at the end of February they denied to the commissioners that they had envisioned a public gathering.[208] As interest in the controversy spread and the public profile of the disputation increased, they will not, however, have been opposed to opening the debate to an audience. The legitimization of their church as the public church would gain from a victory over Coornhert, but would only really be served by public awareness of such a triumph.

Nevertheless, the public character of the disputation was in the first instance a result of practical considerations. The opening up of the discussions was achieved through a series of measures to preserve order taken by Leiden city council on the advice of the States. Those interested could obtain an entrance ticket at the town hall, after answering a few questions. The university hall at Rapenburg, where the disputation was to take place, would be heavily guarded. Troublemakers could be condemned out of hand on the testimony of the "porters" (*portiers*).[209] The aim of the measures was to prevent any disturbances that might arise from the discussions, but it is likely that in practice they only raised temperatures. A highly exceptional gathering was to take place in Leiden. An ad hoc committee of the States, specially created for the occasion,[210] was to meet in the university hall of Leiden in the presence of civic magistrates, ministers of the word, and "several hundreds" of citizens.

---

[207] Coornhert to Cornelisz and Donteclock, 22 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45: "op aerden nyet en heerlijckers en mach doen, dan [. ..] te trecken tot Leyden om godfruchtelic aldaer te handelen metten delfsche predicanten".

[208] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [10v].

[209] Declaration from the steps of the town hall, 7 April 1578, GAL, Stadsarchief Leiden (SA) II, inv. no. 14.

[210] The record of the committee's institution is lacking in the archives of the States of Holland. The earliest mention of "commissioners" is to be found in the acts of the debate: Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [9r].

CHAPTER FOUR

PRO ET CONTRA: THE LEIDEN DISPUTATION (1578)

Along the Rapenburg

The University of Leiden's earliest years were difficult.[1] Yet its foundation in 1575 had been accompanied by bold words. The procession of allegorical figures that paraded past the Rapenburg during the opening ceremonies testified to the pride of the new academy. At the same time, the 'bulwark of liberty' was visibly unable to spend lavishly. A recent overview describes the scene as a "paltry display".[2] The float representing *Sacra Scriptura*, for instance, was on loan from the town of Delft; the decorations were mostly second hand.[3] The university still lacked eminent professors and for years was limited to simple accommodation.[4] In 1577 the convent of St. Barbara, behind the Rapenburg, was exchanged for the former church of the *Faliede Bagijnen* (*Faille*-Mantled Beguines), also behind the canal.[5] This was the building in which the religious disputation in Leiden was to be accommodated from Monday 7 April 1578.

After the festive opening of the university, the disputation between the Delft ministers and Coornhert constituted the first major event in the new academy's life. It is unlikely anyone will have questioned the fact that this political disputation took place within academic walls. After all, the States of Holland had from the beginning been closely involved in the organization of the university, and appointed the curators.[6] One of the very first curators, the jurist Gerard van Hoogeveen (1524–1580), would act as the States' commissioner during

---

[1] Woltjer, *De Leidse universiteit*, 12. The author speaks of "a difficult start."
[2] Otterspeer, *Groepsportret* I, 14.
[3] Ibidem.
[4] The professors present on the opening day had in most cases only agreed to give a limited number of lessons. The tide turned with the arrival of Justus Lipsius in March 1578.
[5] Woltjer, *De Leidse universiteit*, 2. Only in 1581 did the university move into the former convent of the White Ladies on the Rapenburg, that still serves as university hall.
[6] Clotz, *Hochschule für Holland*, 35–36; Otterspeer, *Groepsportret* I, 75–79.

the disputation. The original format of the debate assumed that one or more Leiden professors would take the chair, but by the time the discussions began such a thing was no longer to be thought of. Nevertheless, the States saw no reason to relocate the proceedings, for instance to the town hall. [7]

The presence of two commissioners, who together comprised the ad hoc committee of the States, underlined the significant political importance of the disputation. Leonard Casembrood (died 1604)[8] and Gerard Van Hoogeveen both had an impressive record of service. The choice of these men had been well considered. It was confirmation that the States accorded the disputation the highest priority. As eminent jurists, both Casembrood and Hoogeveen held important positions in the political-juridical establishment of Holland.

Casembrood worked as a councillor of the Court of Holland and had undertaken a number of diplomatic missions on behalf of William of Orange. His status can also be seen from the important part he was to play in the formation of the Union of Utrecht. Hoogeveen had been pensionary of the city of Leiden since 1564, having set aside his work as an advocate at the Court of Holland to take up the post. In 1575 he was named a curator of Leiden University and, on behalf of William of Orange, he took particular care of the financial and legal development of the new university. In the year of his death he was involved in seeking legal justification for offering the 'high government' of Holland and Zeeland to the Prince, as a prelude to the abjuration of loyalty to Philip II a year later. [9] Both Hoogeveen and Casembrood could be expected to keep the disputation in Leiden on track and to ensure that events unfolded in a manner that would serve the common good. [10]

Before the disputation could commence, there was one final practical problem to be addressed: the church of the Faliede Bagijnen was not adequately furnished for a public disputation. The city carpenter, Theunis Cornelisz., had to be brought in to build a podium and rear-

---

[7] Civic disputations in Germany and Switzerland were generally held in the town hall.

[8] *NNBW* VII, 283.

[9] Van der Aa IX, 1132–1134; Daniel van Ceulen, *Het leven van Gerard Amelisz. van Hoogeveen, heere der plaatse van de selve naam, in sijn leven opsiender van de hooge leer-plaatse tot Leiden, en loontrekkend raadsman der selver stede*, tr. from the Latin (Leiden, 1687) [5]-[6].

[10] Hoogeveen's biographer stated that the States vested him with authority over the disputation "to hear it and get the business over with." Van Ceulen, *Het leven*, 5.

range the seating in such a way that a large audience could attend the disputation.[11] The tiny university hall had to accommodate a "great throng of citizens",[12] including almost all members of the city council. A large number of ministers will also have wanted to attend the disputation. With the exception of Guillaume de Feugueray, professor of theology in Leiden and army preacher to William of Orange, they remain anonymous. We also remain ignorant of the names of the two notaries, whose work began with the preliminary discussions on 7 April 1578. In historiography the spotlight has always been on the main figures, Cornelisz and Coornhert, predominantly.

Fury

The commissioners in Leiden, Hoogeveen and Casembroot, were faced with the task of presiding over the discussions and preventing any form of "unseemliness" arising from them. [13] This would require a steady hand, given the tension surrounding the debate. As long as the commissioners kept their cool, the disputation could make measured progress. This would in turn help ensure peace and quiet beyond the confines of the university hall. The States hoped to remove all pretext for troublemaking by furthering an open and orderly debate.

In this context, the furious outburst of the commissioners during the preliminary discussions, aimed at establishing the order of the debate, seems rather at odds with the States' intention to preserve the peace at all times. Needled beyond endurance, the commissioners accused Coornhert of wanting to stir up public unrest. [14] A few days later it was reported that the States were of the opinion that Coornhert was a cause of "schism in the church." [15] The commissioners did not refrain from expressing their displeasure at Coornhert's behaviour, even though this meant going beyond the scope of the debate and possibly even tarnishing their status as supposedly impartial arbiters.

---

[11] Appendices to the accounts of the master of works, GAL, SA II, inv. no. 8635, fo. 22r. After the end of the disputation the carpenter dismantled the construction, again at the charge of the city's master of works (fo. 23r).

[12] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [21r]. Coornhert also mentions "several hundred men". Ibidem, [34v].

[13] Proclamation from the steps of the town hall, 7 April 1578, GAL, SA II, inv. no. 14.

[14] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [14v].

[15] Ibidem, 19r.

The tough language of the commissioners might have been due to irritation. Or were their harsh words calculated to bring Coornhert up short? The commissioners attached great importance to the disputation proceeding according to a predetermined schedule. This would guarantee an outcome that buttressed the position of the Reformed Church. To gain this end, the commissioners might have considered a good dose of verbal violence permissible once it became apparent that Coornhert had no intention of meekly complying with the presented order of the debate.

Coornhert was in no doubt: the disputation in Leiden was fast deteriorating into an inquisition. His pamphlet *Vande Leydtsche disputatie warachtigh verhael*, published in 1583, is one long variation on this theme. It is hard to blame Coornhert. After all, the ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock were responsible for the format of discussions. They were intent on debating a series of general questions, with a strict division of roles between the parties. Coornhert's role was to take a position *contra* the ministers, so that they could bring him down by demolishing his counterarguments. Coornhert had imagined rather more room to manoeuvre in his role as *opponens*. He naturally tried to prevent the ministers from hemming him in.

However, this takes nothing away from the fact that in his pamphlet Coornhert provides an entirely tendentious view of the course of events in Leiden. The main thrust of his account is that the commissioners (at the prompting of the ministers) had compassed him about, but that notwithstanding he had, by the grace of God, returned home triumphant. Coornhert had embarked on a perilous venture and as though by a miracle had been preserved. It is true that in Leiden Coornhert was engaged in an unequal fight and stood up to his opponents rather than let them walk over him. He stuck up for himself and provoked, manoeuvred and manipulated, without regard for the limits agreed beforehand. In brief, he tried to turn the disputation to his own advantage, not without success, which quickly roused the ire of the commissioners.

"And I will have no men as masters of my faith", Coornhert had indignantly declared towards the end of the debate. [16] These words could serve as epigraph to his pamphlet. He presents the debate to his readers as a struggle between good and evil, between liberty and

[16] Ibidem, [33r].

religious constraint. A series of notes in the margins of the text were to guide the reader's interpretation of the account, which only partly consists of the official minutes of the disputation. Coornhert did not have a complete version of the minutes at his disposal, since on some days he had been denied access to the notarial record. This had happened, for instance, when the debate threatened to degenerate into a quarrel even during the preliminary discussions. [17] Where necessary, Coornhert supplemented the minutes from the notes he had either made in his lodgings as a private record ("*notulen*") or prepared in advance as a basis for his argument in the debate ("*memoriën*"). In essence, at least according to Coornhert, these provided a reliable guide to the course the debate had taken, although he could not guarantee that he had entirely stuck to his prepared notes while speaking. He also admitted that by the time he composed the pamphlet his memory was "none too certain". [18]

The modern reader of *Vande Leydtsche disputatie* has to take into account the partiality, and consequent unreliability, of Coornhert's version of events. Because this pamphlet is the only record that we have of the disputation in Leiden, a less tendentious view of the debate can only be formed on the basis of its contents. For a large part the treatise consists of the minutes of the discussions, authenticated at the conclusion of each day's business by the two notaries present. [19] Coornhert provided this official record with critical commentary, which can easily be distinguished from the minutes themselves, and filled in gaps from his own more personal records. This 'free' reporting will certainly have led to some distortion, but it is unlikely that Coornhert deliberately deviated from the facts. In 1583, when Coornhert's pamphlet was printed and circulated, the minutes of the debate were still in the possession of the States and perhaps also of the ministers. Furthermore, only five years after the events reported there would be plenty of witnesses still around, since the debate in Leiden had been held in public. In a printed work, Coornhert will not have wanted to provide any occasion for his opponents to give him the lie.

Coornhert's genuine desire to provide a clearly factual account (hence his incorporation of the minutes) leaves the pamphlet open

[17] Ibidem, [14v], [17v].
[18] Ibidem.
[19] See pp. 14–16.

to alternative readings. Between the lines, the reader can find a very different interpretation of the course of events. In spite of himself, Coornhert reveals that in Leiden he had not been the most reliable of parties to the discussion. Already during the preliminaries he was strategically altering his demands. During the debate itself he failed to stick to the format agreed. The preliminary discussions had given rise to sharp disagreement over the "parts and order" of the debate. This unresolved conflict determined the further course of the disputation. The importance of finding the right "order" for the discussions was underlined in the commissioners' terms of reference, as drawn up by the States. The commissioners were to ensure the "direction" of the discussions, which above all were to be "orderly". [20]

The negotiations preceding the Leiden disputation lasted a week, from 7 to 14 April. There is no mention of any interruption, so there must have been seven days of discussion concerning the "footing, form and manner" of the coming debate. These discussions took place behind closed doors.[21] From the very beginning two notaries had been appointed to keep a record of the discussions. Both the ministers and Coornhert could appoint a notary of their choice. Even during the preliminaries the parties were speaking "into the pen", which would have encouraged them to weigh their words. The minutes might, after all, be made public after the conclusion of the debate. There is no record of any agreement to this effect in Coornhert's account. For the time being the minutes had a more immediate function. Each morning the parties received the minutes of the previous day, as the basis from which to continue.[22]

The difference of opinion between the ministers and Coornhert initially concerned the course of the disputation in Delft. The States had decreed on the authority of the ministers that the *status quaestionis* of the Delft debate should be retained. This had been communicated to all the parties and to the inhabitants of Leiden well in advance. [23]

---

[20] Proclamation from the steps of the town hall, 7 April 1578, GAL, SA II, inv. no. 14.

[21] Coornhert spoke of a "closed room." Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [28v].

[22] Ibidem, [8v]–[9r]. The fact that Coornhert was denied access to the minutes after the outbursts of 8 April 1578 indicates that the commissioners considered the record sensitive. They did not want Coornhert's provocations to be given wider currency.

[23] Proclamation from the steps of the town hall, 7 April 1578, GAL, SA II, inv. no. 14: "As the lord States have desired that the colloquy between the servants of the

In Delft, however, no agreement concerning the *status quaestionis* had been reached. At least, the parties afterwards had differing views of what it had been. [24] This disagreement quickly re-emerged in Leiden. The commissioners began the preliminary discussions by asking what had caused the controversy and how the ensuing debate had evolved.

Cornelisz and Donteclock showed considerable consistency in their answer. In Delft they had put forward three themes, to wit the marks of the true church, the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of free will. They retained the doctrine of predestination as a possible fourth theme. They wished to debate these questions in "general" terms, on the basis of a series of subordinate statements, formulated impartially. In the correspondence with Coornhert preceding the debate in Leiden, they had again confirmed their choice, and in Leiden they again proposed the same *status quaestionis*. This left little room for obscurity. Coornhert, in contrast, flip-flopped. Just as in Delft, he proposed a debate of the issues raised in his first letter to Tilius. He passed over the content of the letter, however, and wanted to discuss the doctrines of justification, predestination and the killing of heretics in order to defend his thesis that "those churches following and professing the doctrine of Calvin and Beza, are no true churches." [25] In his letter to Tilius he had barely touched on these themes. Now he put them at the centre of the debate. Even more: he wanted to deal with the killing of heretics as the first point.[26]

It seems that Coornhert must have realized on the first day of the preliminary discussions that he had walked into a trap. The ministers were in charge of determining the format of debate and with the *status quaestionis* that they proposed there was little chance of him coming off well. His proposal to take the killing of heretics as the first point for discussion was a direct provocation rather than a constructive contribution to the progress of the discussions. Coornhert too had to stick to

---

divine word in the city of Delft and Dirck Volckaertsz. Coornhart shall be resumed and continued here in this city in such manner as was begun between them at Delft." Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, 8v, mentions that the States ordered the mayors of Haarlem to summon Coornhert to appear in Leiden on the agreed date, so that the debate "will again be resumed and continued, in such manner, as was before comprised and initiated in the aforesaid city of Delft." The same order was sent to the mayors of Delft to be communicated to the ministers of Delft, see: States to the mayors of Delft, 15 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[24] See pp. 111–113.

[25] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, 11r.

[26] Ibidem.

the specification of the States that the debate in Delft was to be taken as the basis for further disputation. At Delft there had been no discussion of the killing of heretics, nor had Coornhert mentioned this topic when writing to Tilius soon thereafter.[27]

On the second day of talks, 8 April 1578, the atmosphere could cut be cut with a knife. The ministers were "amazed" at Coornhert's choice of topics. They suggested that their opponent was trying to get out of the intended disputation by taking a "side road". Furthermore, they considered the killing of heretics a political issue [*politijcxe questie*], and one in which they had no desire to involve themselves.[28]

After this surprising turn in the discussions the disagreement became ever more complicated. The focus shifted from the "footing" to the "form and manner" of disputation. It was of great importance to determine who would be taking the part of *respondens* and who that of *opponens*. Rather than be put on the defensive, Coornhert refused to have this aspect of the format dictated by the ministers. The reason he gave was that he should have the status of "initiator" or "opponent".[29] He was, after all, the one who had opened the attack on the ministers!

This question of sides (*partije*) was important, perhaps even weightier than the difference of opinion concerning the *status quaestionis*. Whoever was assigned the role of *opponens*, could control the debate. The *opponens* set the tone of the debate and could decide to question aspects of the respondent's case. The *respondens* had to commit to a certain thesis, to be maintained against the arguments of the *opponens*. His room for manoeuvre was considerably more limited. What Cornelisz and Donteclock were aiming for in Leiden, was a variation on this design. Coornhert was allowed to speak as *opponens*, but was not given the freedom to determine which questions would be discussed. That was to be determined by the ministers on the basis of the *status quaestionis*. Coornhert would be given a proposition with which either to assent or dissent. He was given the option of choosing to be for or against. *Pro* or *contra*, that was his choice. If Coornhert wished to dissent, he had to provide reasons for his opposition. The respondents, Cornelisz and Donteclock, would then refute these arguments.

---

[27] Coornhert to Tilius, 11 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.
[28] Ibidem, [12r].
[29] Ibidem, [11v].

The debate concerning the *status quaestionis* was closely related to the difference about the assignment of parts in the disputation. Coornhert wanted to be *opponens*, but thought he could only do so effectively if the ministers openly recognized Calvin and Beza as their teachers. The general *status quaestionis* proposed by the ministers gave him no hook on which to hang his own views. In his first letter to Tilius, Coornhert had already directed his criticism explicitly at "all churches whose teachers take the Genevan, or Calvinian, or Bezan doctrine for true doctrine." [30] In the weeks prior to the disputation in Delft this line of approach had led to a *status quaestionis* in which Coornhert expressly called into question the legitimacy of the doctrine, the preaching and the ecclesial status of the followers of Calvin and Beza.[31] Coornhert now again referred to this scheme. [32]

Cornelisz and Donteclock were not interested in a party fight and refused to take on the roles of advocates for the doctrines of Calvin and Beza. The ministers' rejection of Coornhert's proposal to put the killing of heretics at the top of the agenda could leave no doubt about this. Coornhert would have liked to give weight to his position by bringing Beza's famous *Traité de l'autorité du magistrat en la punition des hérétiques* into the discussion. [33] He cited Beza as saying: "And yet who does not see, that if the magistrate dissimulates and does not do his duty, as the case requires, that great peril follows and the public ruin of the church?" [34] Coornhert blithely embroidered on the theme: "for mistakes in the following of such a doctrine make the hands of the magistrates red with the innocent blood of the true members of Christ."[35] The ministers claimed never to have advocated the killing of heretics, "and also not to have read such a general proposition

---

[30] Coornhert, *Redene*, 1.

[31] The issue of killing heretics was not on the list of possible points of discussion. Coornhert to Tilius, 11 March 1578, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 45.

[32] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [14r].

[33] In 1582 Coornhert probably used the same French translation, namely Th. Beza, *Traité de l'authorité du magistrat en la punition des hérétiques et du moyen d'y procéder* (Geneva, 1560). Coornhert, *Synodus* I, 10. The Latin original had been published in 1554 under the title *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis libellus* .

[34] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [15v]–[16r]: "Ende nochtans wie ist die niet en siet, dat so die magistraet dissimuleert ende zijn devoir niet en doet, soot de sake vereyschet, dat daer wt volcht een groot peryckel ende openbare ruyne vande kercke?"

[35] Ibidem, [16r]: "[…] want het misverstandt int navolgen van sulcken leere, maect des magistrates handen meestendeel roodt aent onnosel bloedt vande ware lidtmaten Christi."

in Calvin and Beza." [36] Coornhert accused the ministers of cowardice. They dared not show their true colours, knowing that the people, "still carrying with sorrow the wounds of such teaching", would spit them out.[37]

Where Coornhert hoped to force the ministers to take sides in a highly polarized debate, the ministers themselves wanted to transcend divisions. They were not there to defend the teachings of Calvin and Beza, but universal Christian doctrine. Their *status quaestionis* was drawn up in neutral terms and deliberately avoided divisive issues. With regard to the doctrine of justification, the ministers proposed first listing the precise points where the parties differed. They also wanted explicitly to list points of agreement. This left plenty of space for nuance. The subsidiary topics proposed for this main theme also indicate that the ministers were trying to avoid a debate about imputed righteousness. They would rather put the spotlight on their own thoughts "on the business of sanctification or the renewal of life."[38] Such a choice of topic left room to explore common ground with Coornhert's views.

In Coornhert's account of the preliminaries in Leiden there is little to elucidate the reaction of the ministers and the States to his unpredictable behaviour. The reason he gives for this is that neither the minutes at his disposal nor his own notes were sufficient to do so.[39] Coornhert must however have come up against fierce resistance and lost what little credit he still had. The further the negotiations advanced, the more his demands increased. The preliminaries had turned into a power struggle, in which Coornhert quickly increased the pressure on the commissioners and the ministers. Where he had initially agreed to facing two antagonists, at a later stage in the negotiations he demanded that one of the ministers be "mustered out". [40] That would prevent an unequal contest. He also demanded that an "extract or authenticated copy" of the minutes of the previous day be delivered to him each morning, as had previously been agreed. [41]

---

[36] Ibidem, [12r].
[37] Ibidem, [14r].
[38] Ibidem, [12v].
[39] Ibidem, [29v].
[40] Ibidem, [18r].
[41] Ibidem, [18r]–[18v].

That Coornhert was not in the strongest of positions, can be seen from the fact that he found it necessary to moderate his demands in the conflict over the *status quaestionis*. The way in which he gave ground is illustrative of his self-assertive, at times even impertinent manner of negotiating. With undisguised sarcasm, Coornhert conceded that "at the last, to advance the honour of God, the salvation of men, and the peace of our commonwealth to the extent of my small ability, I will be satisfied to set aside the aforesaid questions of the killing of heretics, and predestination, until these young ministers have become more aged in learning in the same questions". [42] The age difference between him and the ministers was to become a recurrent theme in the discussions. Coornhert hoped to extort respect for his "grey hairs" and inspire sympathy for his having to face youthful preachers who had the advantage of being "fresh of memory". [43]

Finally, on 13 April 1578, Coornhert tried to obtain a copy of the terms of reference that the commissioners had received from the States, which he claimed had already fixed the *status quaestionis* and the manner of disputation. [44] After a week's negotiations he had still not gained his end. With an eye to the looming impasse, one of the commissioners had departed for The Hague on 10 April 1578 to consult with the States. [45] This led to even greater tension. The ministers would have preferred the difference of opinion concerning the *status quaestionis* to be submitted to Leiden University. The scholars there could determine which articles might best serve "to edification of the hearers and discovery of the truth."[46] The commissioners, however, did not involve the university further. By consulting with the States, they underscored the political nature of their mandate.

The commissioners stuck to their refusal to reveal to Coornhert the terms of reference they had received from the States. Obviously, this document would lay bare, so Coornhert suspected, the partiality of

---

[42] Ibidem, [17r]: "Entlijck, omme immers na mijn cleyn vermogen die godtlicke eere, der menschen heyl, ende des gemeen-lants rust te voorderen, be nick noch te vreden die voors. stucken vant ketterdooden, ende predestinatie ter zijden te stellen, tot dat dese ionge ministers wat ouder int verstandt der selver stucken gheworden sullen zijn."

[43] Ibidem, [18r].

[44] Ibidem, [18v]. The terms of reference provided to the ad hoc committee does not survive.

[45] Ibidem, [14v].

[46] Ibidem, [13r].

the States, as mirrored in the closeness of their cooperation with the ministers.[47] Coornhert now set his sights on unmasking the partiality of the States, which would knock the foundations from under the disputation. Although the outcome of the disputation could in important respects be determined in advance by the choice of *status quaestionis* and the assigning of roles as *opponens* and *respondens*—two questions in which the voice of the commissioners counted for a great deal—the States had no desire to be openly seen to be taking sides. The commissioners should give every impression of maintaining impartial balance so that truth could triumph. Nevertheless, they were forced to intervene in order to suppress the conflict with Coornhert. They chose to publicize one stipulation made in the official orders of the States from which they derived their powers: the parties were to deal and speak in "orderly" and "edifying" manner, and to use no authority but "Sacred Scripture".[48] With this stipulation, the States excluded any reference to the writings of Calvin and Beza.

The commissioners chose to go head to head with Coornhert. On Sunday, 13 April 1578, the last day of the preliminary talks, Coornhert was presented with an ultimatum. There was to be no further discussion about the possible release of the orders given by the States. The fate of the disputation now lay in Coornhert's hands, and the commissioners demanded that he explicitly accede that very day to the provisions made by the States. According to the commissioners, the prohibition of citing the works of Calvin and Beza was related to the conviction of the States that Coornhert's intention was to cause further schisms within the church.[49] Coornhert made the point that he wanted to cite the works of Calvin and Beza in order to show that these confused theologians contradicted themselves on numerous points, which would demolish the authority of their writings.[50] The importance of the possibility of citing Calvin and Beza was, however, more fundamental. With this road barred to him, Coornhert would be unable to pin down Cornelisz and Donteclock on specific doctrines (given the absence of any theological works of their own). According to Coornhert that reduced the debate to irrelevance.

---

[47] Compare the instructions of the ad hoc committee for the religious disputation in The Hague, see pp. 208–209, 211–214.

[48] Ibidem, [19r].

[49] Ibidem.

[50] Ibidem, [19r]–[19v].

After due consideration Coornhert decided that he would after all—with great reluctance—accede to the stipulation of the States. He did not have much choice. His own account records that two friends advised him to drop his objections. [51] If Coornhert wanted to retain his honour there was now no way out. Even though he regarded the debate as a "muzzled disputation" and as a harbinger of the constraint of conscience that he feared "will come here as it has in Geneva", Coornhert could not afford to give the impression that he was afraid of facing the ministers. [52] With hindsight he declared that his commitment to the struggle against constraint of conscience was "the sole reason […] of my coming to Leiden." [53] Nonetheless, he had played the trump card of the theme of the killing of heretics only in the very last phase of the actual disputation. In short, Coornhert retroactively reduced the stakes of the disputation to a single issue, literally making it a matter of life and death.

A rhetorical interpretation of Coornhert's position during the preliminaries in Leiden would suggest that he wanted to achieve some specific effect by broaching the emotionally charged subject of the killing of heretics. It was by this means that Coornhert hoped, after all, to put the ministers on the spot. How else could he convince the States and the audience of the disputation that the ministers held false doctrines, after he had been denied the opportunity to proclaim the central message formulated in the *Redene*? This is not to say that Coornhert's strategic manoeuvring can be seen as superficial striving for effect, for it seems that he was sincerely concerned that a "Genevan inquisition" was to be imposed eventually. However, this does not rule out that the attention he gave to this issue was out of proportion to its actuality. In any case, he presented the ministers as guilty before they had even put their own case.

The issue of the killing of heretics was only a particularly sharp instance of the broader problem of ecclesial disunity. According to Coornhert constraint of conscience would be a necessary consequence of giving a false church the status of public church. This church would sooner or later make its position of power felt, Coornhert reasoned,

---

[51] Ibidem, [21r].
[52] Ibidem, [19v]–[21r].
[53] Ibidem, [20r].

as its position of authority was far from self-evident and lacked firm grounding. The ministers, meanwhile, expressly distanced themselves from any thoughts of using force.

However, what is certain is that Coornhert's accusations touched a nerve with the ministers. Opponents often abused them as 'Calvinist', a term with clearly persecutory connotations. It was widely known that in Calvin's Geneva, dissident preachers were prosecuted, banished, in a few cases executed. The Prince of Orange was aware that Reformed ministers could be tarred with the same brush. He made it clear that many among the populace believed the warnings—voiced, among others, by Catholic clergymen—that the Reformed Church would replicate the power politics that had formerly characterized the Catholic Church's hegemonic position.[54] This was the reason that the Prince gave in support of his view that strict measures against anabaptists would be inopportune.

Disorder

On Monday 14 April 1578 the Leiden disputation finally commenced.[55] Speculation concerning the progress of the preliminaries had in the meantime been circulating in the city for a week. Interest in the debate was now even more widespread. Coornhert rightly, and to some degree ominously, spoke of "this now widely bruited affair".[56] The minutes of the discussions show that the debate got down to detail within the first day. At first sight the debate went more smoothly than might have been predicted from the course of the preliminaries. Nevertheless the proceedings in Leiden can only be described as disorderly. This was due to the lack of agreement between Coornhert and the ministers on the *status quaestionis* and on the part each was to take in the discussion. The strength of a religious disputation lay in the fact that it provided a format for a well- ordered exchange of views. With no clear

---

[54] "Laudavitque dictum Monachi […] excipientis ad ea quae tum sibi obiciebantur, haud aeque diu nostrorum ollam calefactam fuisse, atque illorum quos tantopere incesseremus, videre se plane, antequam per saeculorum intervallum labatur, parem utrobique imperii Ecclesiastici fore rationem." Marnix of Sint Aldegonde to Gaspar van der Heyden, 31 March 1577, in *Marnixi epistulae: De briefwisseling van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde; Een kritische uitgave*, vol. 2, *1577–1578*, ed. Aloïs Gerlo and Rudolf De Smet (Brussels, 1992), 80.

[55] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [21r].

[56] Ibidem, [17v].

order of debate, there could be no hope of a balanced progress in the discussions or of an authoritative outcome.

Coornhert's account does not reveal which *status quaestionis* was officially adopted. Shortly after the beginning of the proceedings he even suggested that the ministers had refused to fix a *status* and were just bringing topics up as they pleased. [57] This has to be regarded as detraction, as it is highly likely that the commissioners had adopted the *status quaestionis* proposed by the ministers. Coornhert's *status quaestionis*, in which the teachings of Calvin and Beza had been central, had failed to make it through the preliminaries. One of the commissioners formally opened the disputation, and will have set out the *status quaestionis* while doing so. It is telling that Coornhert omitted the commissioner's opening words from his account. During the disputation he had no intention of being limited by the *status* decided on, and afterwards tried to hide his wayward behaviour by denying the *status* entirely.

That the atmosphere in the university hall was already getting heated can be seen from the commissioners' decision to prohibit the parties from making opening statements. These were a usual part of a disputation, an occasion to set out the positions of either side before the debate began. The commissioners considered it too risky, however, and simply introduced the debate themselves with a few well-chosen words. Cornelisz was then asked to lead the assembly in prayer, which according to Coornhert he did "very devoutly".[58] When Coornhert and the ministers took their places on the podium, the hall went quiet. Those present listened "eagerly and in silence". [59]

During the morning session the debate got off to a slow start.[60] Coornhert and Cornelisz manoeuvred carefully. They had not faced one another publicly before. The presence of the audience initially made the disputants more reserved. The division of parts was still not clear. Both parties claimed the initiative, refusing to be caught up in a debate with an agenda set by the other. The parties circled one another, while the annoyance on either side grew. Ultimately it

[57] Ibidem, [22r].
[58] Ibidem, [21r].
[59] Ibidem.
[60] This morning session lasted from eight till eleven, and was followed by an afternoon session from two to four. Ibidem, [28v].

was Coornhert who took the bait. Cornelisz managed to get him to elucidate his rejection of the marks of the true church as set out by the minister. By doing so Coornhert had *de facto* accepted the role of *respondens*, as Cornelisz had intended from the start.

Cornelisz was the first to speak.[61] The commissioners presented him as the "leader" of the debate. He did not speak on his own account, but ex officio as a Reformed *predikant*. In the minutes Cornelisz is identified with the letter 'M', for minister. From the beginning it was clear that the minister wanted to minimize differences with Coornhert. The *status quaestionis* prescribed first of all a discussion of the "true visible church of God". The first *quaestio* asked "what had been the form of the true apostolic visible church?"[62] Cornelisz gave a description of the visible church at the time of the Apostles that must have been entirely acceptable to Coornhert.[63] It was now Coornhert's turn to take a position *pro* or *contra* Cornelisz's "proposition". Step by step Cornelisz tried to bring his opponent to the furthest point of consensus. Coornhert saw no benefit in this. It was not long before he expressed his dissatisfaction with being catechized according to the Socratic method (*Socratico more*). His reactions were irritable and he underlined that it was not his intention to say what view he held on any issue "about which I have moved no question."[64] It was up to the ministers to find scriptural warrant for their own assertions.[65] Coornhert had lost sight of the fact that it was not up to the *respondens* to set the agenda, but only to respond to the arguments of the *opponens*.

Cornelisz made it clear to Coornhert that he intended to prescribe the topics for discussion, "to which we hold that Coornhert ought to say either yea or nay."[66] He refused to let himself be thrown off by a counterpart who—without reference to the *status quaestionis*—

---

[61] Ibidem, [21v]. Donteclock was all the while feverishly taking notes and, to Coornhert's considerable irritation, passing written suggestions to his companion. Ibidem, [28v].

[62] Ibidem, [12r].

[63] Ibidem, [21v]. Cornelisz sketched the earliest community of faith "in which the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles was preached by duly commissioned ministers, and the sacraments instituted by Christ, to wit holy baptism and the holy supper." He also identified provision for the poor and the keeping of the commandments as characteristics of the apostolic congregation.

[64] Ibidem, [21v].

[65] Ibidem, [23r].

[66] Ibidem, [22r].

sought to explain the difference between the visible and the invisible church.[67] Cornelisz held his ground, and ultimately Coornhert came round. Cornelisz distinguished two marks of the true, visible and "well reformed" church, to wit "preaching pure apostolic doctrine" and "the right use of the sacraments". Both were, according to Scripture, instituted by Christ himself so that the true church could be recognized.[68] At the end of the morning session Coornhert responded to the proposition of the ministers with a two-part "demonstration".

Coornhert's manner of argumentation must have been familiar to the ministers, for it was in just the same way that he had sought to corner them in the written polemic.[69] He first of all stated that there had been many abuses in the Old Testament church of the Jews, "such that both in teaching, and in ceremonies or outward gestures, at times nothing remained whole in the church of the Jews from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet."[70] Nevertheless, the Jewish church had been a true and visible church. Coornhert gave an evocative illustration from the life of Christ. Christ, Truth itself, had been circumcised in the church of the Jews, which sealed its status as true church. At the same time, untruth had so come to dominate in the Jewish church that Christ was murdered by the same Jews. Here, then, was a true church that lacked the preaching of true doctrine.

As a second point against Cornelisz, Coornhert argued that the minister's marks of the church could not give "certainty" as to the true visible church. Many different churches thought that they proclaimed true doctrine and administered the sacraments duly. The ministers were therefore answering one dark question with another.[71] Here Coornhert adopted a well-known sceptical argument, asking for a criterion by which to test the criteria proposed.[72] Without such a criterion, the proposed criteria were considered useless, because they could not close the question. However, though Coornhert here pro-

---

[67] Ibidem, [21v]. Coornhert was evidently seeking a connection with his first letter to Tilius, in which this distinction was key.

[68] Ibidem.

[69] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 3–12, 20–25.

[70] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [24r].

[71] Ibidem.

[72] Ibidem. In Coornhert's words: "before all else is needed another certainty, by which the marks, that will give certainty of a thing, themselves may be known for certain."

fessed a sceptical line of reasoning, this should not be taken to indicate that he was in principle committed to scepticism. [73]

In the afternoon Coornhert developed his argument further, again going beyond the *status quaestionis*. The ministers and the commissioners must have been further infuriated by Coornhert making a passing but wounding reference to the current religious situation: the ministers lacked criteria to claim with certainty that theirs (rather than the Catholic, Baptist or Lutheran) was the true, visible, "well reformed" church. All equally cried "Templum Domini, Templum Domini, with us is to be found Christ, pure teaching and the right use of the sacraments", so that confusion had arisen concerning the true marks of the church. As a result, they could not be used as criteria for identifying the true visible church. [74] The ministers replied to this accusation with a point of order. Current religious divisions were not the topic of the question at hand. The question was whether, in general, a visible church could be recognized from the preaching of apostolic doctrine. [75] The ministers tried to return to the more general question, but were losing control of the proceedings.

On this first day of disputation proper, Cornelisz and Donteclock tried to refute the main thrust of Coornhert's argument by making a formal (scholastic) distinction between the form and the substance of the true visible church. The Jewish church might have had imperfections as to form, but in respect of substance it was nevertheless the true visible church of God "by reason of the covenant that God had made with the Jews." A true visible church of God therefore did not need to be a "well ordered and well reformed" church.[76] The concept "true" should be seen not as meaning "well ordered", but rather related to the fact that "there the true God had set his outward services, by which he had distinguished his people from other nations." When, however, the ministers spoke of true doctrine as a mark of the (true) visible church then this should only be taken to refer to a church which had a "well ordered form in accordance with God's word." [77] Just as a school or a town could be judged according to outward characteristics such as the

---

[73] According to Popkin, the debate about the (im)possibility of finding a criterion for truth lay at the basis of "the intellectual crisis of the Reformation". Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 1–17; Idem, "Theories of Knowledge," in *CHRP*, 680.

[74] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [27r].

[75] Ibidem, [27v]–[28r].

[76] Ibidem, [24v].

[77] Ibidem, [26r]–[26v].

school rules or the civic constitution, Cornelisz argued that the true church could be identified on the basis of its outward characteristics.[78]

The very thing that Coornhert wanted to debate was the essence, the "substance" of the true church, not its outward form. He rejected the subtle case made by the ministers and stated, with a certain disdain for the niceties they had displayed, that he was convinced that "a church is a true church, even were it deformed." Stronger still: if one were to take the position of the ministers as a guide to the true church in Old Testament times, one would not find it in Jerusalem, as true doctrine was lacking there. By their manner of reasoning, the ministers were keeping the faithful from finding the one, true church. Coornhert could not, however, bend the ministers, for to his annoyance they simply agreed with him. They too held that the Jewish church had been the true church and that a deformed church could therefore be a true church, on condition that the distinction between form and substance was retained.

This technical approach to argumentation was hard for Coornhert to beat. The ministers had drawn his sting by assenting, with provisos, to what had been meant as a provocative observation about the Jewish church. He could only hope that the distinctions and provisos of the ministers would be too dark for the audience, throwing his own bolder statements into relief. Coornhert's position did, however, have a second support. He had countered his opponent's assertion that the preaching of true doctrine and the rightful administration of the sacraments were to be regarded as marks of the true visible church not only with a reference to Old Testament times, but also with recourse to scepticism. So Coornhert had asserted that these characteristics were in themselves not unequivocal enough to function as criteria for the true visible church. There was no criterion against which these marks could be tested so that greater unanimity could be reached concerning them. In their rebuttal the ministers showed that their debating skills were not limited to formal logic. They too could fascinate the townsfolk of Leiden with arguments that caught the imagination and appealed to common sense.

The ministers parried Coornhert's sceptical attack with a defence of the ultimate knowability of true doctrine. Despite the extent of disagreement about the correct interpretation of the Bible and the doctrine

[78] Ibidem, [23v].

of the sacraments, they rejected the idea that "true and healthful doctrine could not be clearly recognized, and that Scripture should be so dark that it were impossible to understand it aright to know the church by it." [79] The ministers not only brought places of Scripture in support of their opinion, but also referred to one of Coornhert's prints, which must have been widely known. On this copperplate engraving, Coornhert had represented Luther holding up a torch, the light of Scripture, to banish "the darkness of ignorance in papistry". [80] The ministers thus sought to show that Coornhert too was of the opinion that it was possible for a man to shed light on divine teaching. Coornhert did not deny that Luther had illuminated many serious errors in the church of the popes, but in his view this did not entail that Luther had necessarily lit the way to true doctrine. [81]

Coornhert continually emphasized the inability of most people to know true doctrine. This was due to "the darkness […] in people's eyes" and not to Scripture, which "is clear to the understanding". [82] Again the ministers entirely agreed with Coornhert's position. His words could be harmonized with their own statement that some could indeed fully understand doctrine. Coornhert had even explicitly stated that he was not of the opinion that true doctrine was unknowable to all. He did not allow himself to be thrown by the conciliatory attitude adopted by the ministers, and continued to speak in strongly antithetical terms of the difference between "the clear sun" of Scripture and the "dark torch" of human understanding. He was trying to suggest that the ministers overestimated human understanding. In his opinion, their approach to the faith was too academic. Here Coornhert was following in the footsteps of a long series of critics of learned theologians.[83] The thousands of commentators on sacred Scripture, according

---

[79] Ibidem, [25r]: "die ware ende ghesonde leere niet en soude connen claerlijck bekent werden, ended at die schrift so duyster zijn soude dat het onmodelijck waer die recht te verstaen om die kerc daer door te kennen."

[80] Ibidem, [25v]. The engraving to which Cornelisz referred is TIB 5501.071.9. See Ilja M. Veldman, ed., *Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert* , The Illustrated Bartsch 55 (New York, 1991), 262.

[81] Ibidem, [26r].

[82] Ibidem, [25v]–[26r].

[83] Gilly, "Das Sprichwort 'Die Gelehrten die Verkehrten'", passim. The author gives an overview of the many applications of the saying 'the more learned, the more wrong', from the late Middle Ages to the period of the Reformation. This aphorism testified to resistance against the established order of learning, and especially theologians. Because this critical note was often struck within learned circles, it would

to Coornhert, showed by their labours that they took Scripture alone not to be clear, something that Coornhert fiercely contested. Had they assumed the opposite, they would have seen their labour as wasted. By this means Coornhert tried to put the line of reasoning followed by the ministers in a poor light, but in doing so he was getting further and further away from what the ministers had actually said.

The ministers stuck to their view that true doctrine was knowable to some, despite the repeated scepticism expressed by Coornhert, who insisted that as far as doctrine was concerned denial was more reliable than assertion. Ultimately the ministers freed themselves from the quagmire of this discussion by correcting Coornhert on pragmatic grounds. They stated that in the past every point of doctrine had been disputed, but that this could not mean that some degree of knowledge concerning doctrine was categorically excluded. Arius's denial of the divinity of Christ had not meant that a general doubt had arisen as to the divine nature of Christ. If it were impossible to come to certain knowledge of the truth of doctrine, Coornhert should also doubt his own opinions. Sacred Scripture would, by implication, serve no useful purpose, although in their view the writing of it was inspired by the Holy Spirit for the illumination of man. In short, the ministers would not budge from the position that true doctrine was knowable and could serve as a basis on which to identify the true church. Scripture could, after all, be used to test the truth of teachings.

Cornelisz concluded the first day's exchanges with a sense of satisfaction. Coornhert's points had been sufficiently blunted. The minister concluded "that the dissension that is between many concerning the Scriptures and thereby concerning the church by no means proves that this doctrine should not be the mark of the church." [84] In Cornelisz's view, Coornhert had failed to substantiate his position as *respondens*. One might, however, wonder whether the debate had really got anywhere. Cornelisz might present himself as having won the first round, he had yet to get the other party to see the debate in the terms he had tried to impose. It became apparent the following day how fragile the order of the debate still was.

---

be wrong to describe it as populist or anti-intellectual. The scholarly Castellio, for instance, used the maxim only to reject "corrupt" forms of knowledge that broke the link between understanding and faith—both of which are of divine origin.

[84] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [28v].

Settling Accounts

For Coornhert, the course of events during the first day of the Leiden disputation had been most unsatisfactory. The ministers had lured him into a debate about the marks of the visible church. [85] According to Coornhert this had been a question of "pushing hard", and the ministers had gone further than they were warranted in going. He felt that as respondents ("defendants") they should have left the initiative to him. Coornhert still regarded himself as the opponent ("accuser"). [86] As such he wished to initiate a debate in which he could demonstrate that the teachings of Calvin and Beza were in key respects false, with all the consequences that this would have for the public status of the Reformed Church.[87]

Coornhert reacted to the looming shipwreck of his masterplan not only with irritation, but also with misgiving. Despite all his bravura, he seems to have felt insecure. Cornelisz and Donteclock were academic heavyweights, reason enough for Coornhert to worry. On top of this, he found disputation hard going. Coornhert had come to regard his memory as too weak to allow him to answer "punctually" the large number of arguments that Cornelisz had presented the previous day. His thought processes were too slow to launch at once into a detailed refutation of Cornelisz's arguments. He needed more preparation time. After all, Coornhert stated, he was not as at home in these matters as the ministers. The question was even "entirely raw" to him.[88] This does seem to overstate his predicament. Coornhert might have lacked the academic background that would have given him experience and suppleness in debate, and his age may also have been a problem, but his self-pity is partly strategic. He was, as it were, apologizing in advance for the self-willed course he intended to follow. In general terms he hoped to "part from the darkness of my own and all people's intellect, and by cleaving to the words of Christ to come to the heavenly light of the knowledge of truth."[89] That would

---

[85] Ibidem, [29r]. The ministers had broached the question of the marks of the true church and "by the commissioners' avowal" Coornhert found himself obliged to dispute on the issue.

[86] Coornhert used the terms "aenlegger" and "aensegger".

[87] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [28v]–[29r].

[88] Ibidem, [30r].

[89] Ibidem: "scheyden wt die duysterheydt van mijn ende alder menschen vernuft, ende doort blijven inden woorden Christi te comen tot het hemelsche licht vande waerheydts kennisse."

have to satisfy his "learned" opponents. By expressing himself in these terms, Coornhert was implicitly condemning what had thus far been an 'academic' debate. His complaints were naturally designed to elicit the audience's sympathy.

Coornhert did not lack fighting spirit. The night before he had gone over his notes of the first day's proceedings and framed a plan of attack. He presented himself on the second day with a dual purpose. Firstly, he wanted to make short work of Cornelisz's defence of true doctrine as a mark of the true church, and secondly he intended to prove:

> That from Arent Cornelisz. own words must follow, that the Roman church were the true church, and the Calvinian church no church at all, any more than a shadow, which was now the principal point I had resolved to prove, as well as being the first cause from which all these disputations both in Delft and in Leiden had begun.[90]

Thus would Coornhert repeat in public the reprehended message of his first letter to Tilius. The price for doing so was high. He was wilfully breaking with the format of the debate and defying the authority of the commissioners.

The university hall in Leiden was even more full on the second day of disputation than on the first. Coornhert speaks of "several hundred men".[91] During the discussions many more must have come to the town hall for entrance tickets. [92] The audience was to be treated to a spectacular display, for an hour and a half after proceedings were resumed Coornhert reached a grand apotheosis that put all his previous manoeuvres in the shade. He pulled out all the stops, brushed aside all agreements reached, and enraged the ministers and commissioners with his behaviour.

It was Coornhert's turn to speak first. He never got round to a well-formulated rebuttal of the ministers. He made a few short remarks adding nuance to his words of the previous day concerning the

---

[90] Ibidem, [29r]: "Dat wt Arent Cornelisz. eyghen woorden moste volgen, dat die Roomsche kercke die ware kercke ware, ende die calviniaensche kercke geen kercke, maer niet dan een schaduwe, twelc nu het principaelste stuck was, dat ick voorghenomen hadde te bewijsen, oock deerste oorsaecke van alle dese disputatien so tot Delft als tot Leyden begonnen zijnde."

[91] Ibidem, [29r], [34v].

[92] There was every opportunity to do so, as a commissioner of the city council of Leiden (appointed in consultation with the commissioners of the States) was available at the town hall for one hour every morning from 7 April onwards to issue tickets to "approved" citizens. Proclamation from the steps of the town hall, GAL, SA II, inv. no. 14.

knowability of true doctrine. But he quickly moved on to the second part of his argument, concerning the Old Testament church of the Jews. The moment for the final charge had come. By stating that the Jewish church, although deformed, could in substance be regarded as the true church, the ministers had, Coornhert claimed, confirmed his "chief point and proposition", namely "that these Reformed churches, the teachers of which adhere to the doctrines of Calvin and Beza, and teach them to the people, are no true churches." [93]

Coornhert had now shamelessly introduced the names of Calvin and Beza into the debate, to the fury of the commissioners. They immediately intervened, "snapping at me bitterly that I had infringed the fair conditions that they had got me to agree to in the closet play" (a reference to the preliminary discussions concerning the *status*). The commissioners gave Coornhert to understand that he was in danger of falling into disfavour with the States, now that he openly flouted the authority of the government. The Leiden professor of theology De Feugueray also intervened in the controversy, appealing to the commissioners. The Frenchman had not been able to follow the discussions well, but he had pricked up his ears when he heard Coornhert mention Calvin and Beza by name. Coornhert addressed the professor in French, after which he reportedly said nothing further. In his own account Coornhert gave the impression that his own superior linguistic knowledge had given him an advantage over the professor. After this incident he addressed himself exclusively to the commissioners. [94]

Coornhert defended himself by stating that he had not cited the writings of Calvin and Beza, but had merely mentioned their names. This was something the commissioners had never forbidden. Should they do so now, he would leave Leiden. The furious commissioners were initially unrelenting, and Coornhert made a first move towards leaving by tucking his Bible under his arm. With a great sense of the dramatic he put one hand to his beard and declared that he was too old to be wasting his time on a debate so lacking in clarity and impartiality.[95] This turned up the heat on the commissioners, the accusation of partiality especially. Under these circumstances, the public nature

---

[93] Ibidem, [30v]: "dat die gereformeerde kercken, welcker leeraren Calvini ende Bese leere ghelovende, die den volcke leeren, gheen ware kercken en zijn."
[94] Ibidem, [29r].
[95] Ibidem, [29v].

of the disputation in Leiden worked in Coornhert's favour. The commissioners dared not silence him in the presence of so many auditors.[96] They permitted Coornhert, for the duration of that session, to mention the names of Calvin and Beza. [97] It was a concession that Coornhert seized with both hands.

Coornhert had tried to dispose of the marks of the true church as proposed by the ministers with reference to the Jewish church of the Old Testament. The ministers had then conceded that this church should be considered the "true church according to substance, but not according to form." [98] Coornhert's argument about the Jewish church was his Trojan horse. In the first instance his argument served the point at hand; but in the final phase of the debate it became a weapon against the Reformed Church. Coornhert reasoned as follows: if the Jewish church could be a true church although deformed (as the ministers conceded), then the same could as easily be true of the deformed churches in the Low Countries. In this regard Coornhert had already mentioned the Catholic, Baptist and Lutheran churches. [99] To show that the Reformed Church in particular was a false church, however, Coornhert had to dig deeper. The heart of the issue turned out to lie in a historical analysis of the concept "substance of doctrine". In which church had this been expressed over the course of the centuries?

The ministers had held that despite the depravity of the Jewish church, the presence of the "substance of doctrine" had to be presumed. This meant that in essence this church was a true church. The ministers cited the words of Christ, "for salvation is from the Jews", [100] and suggested that within the Jewish church the ceremonies had remained intact "in their substance". After all, these ceremonies testified to the believers of the true church of God. [101] Coornhert, however, in his concluding remarks denied that the substance of doctrine could

---

[96] After the proceedings the commissioners blamed Coornhert with exacting, "before the people," a deviation from the terms of reference issued by the States. Ibidem, [32v].

[97] Ibidem, [29v].

[98] Ibidem, [30v]. The ministers however stuck to their proposition that true doctrine and the right administration of the sacraments could be used as marks of the true church.

[99] Ibidem, [27r].

[100] John 4:22. Ibidem, [27v].

[101] Ibidem.

have lain in a Jewish church "if it killed Christ". The Jewish church could not possibly claim the substance of doctrine ("the most principal part of doctrine"), because it had rejected Christ, "the only cornerstone and foundation".[102] In his definition of the substance of doctrine Coornhert argued from a purely historical perspective:

> For I hold the most principal part of doctrine to be knowledge of the one true God, and that Jesus is Christ, that is, the promised Messiah that God foretold by Moses and by all the Prophets, commanding to give ear to and accept him, for whom all patriarchs looked, built, and hoped, and all drank from this spiritual rock, and ate and drank alike meat and drink of this bread of Heaven or man .[103]

To prevent the ministers from claiming that this argument after all made the *substance* of doctrine a mark of the true church, Coornhert held that the Jewish church, although lacking the substance ofdoctrine, had nevertheless been a true church. Only then could Coornhert safely move on to applying this reasoning to the Catholic Church. [104]

To demonstrate the continuity of doctrine in the Catholic Church, Coornhert was obliged to find a timeless factor in the history of the Church. This brought him perilously close to the ministers' line of reasoning, which had been based on universal characteristics. The distinction that the ministers had made between form and substance made it even harder for Coornhert to differentiate his own views from theirs. The example of the Jewish church had helped Coornhert, but could not bring a convincing victory. For this he needed a historical argument in which the unity of the church could serve as an undisputed premise. While speaking, Coornhert sketched the blueprint of the true visible church as he envisioned it:

> The most principal articles of the teaching and the public profession thereof, comprehended in the twelve articles of faith has always from Apostolic times remained in the Roman church, together with the right

---

[102] Ibidem, [31r].

[103] Ibidem: "Want ic houde het principaelste stuc vande leere te zijn kennisse des eenigen waren Gods, ended at Jesus is Christus, dats die beloofde Messias, vanden welcken Godt door Moysen, ende door allen Propheten heft ghetuycht ende bevolen datmen hem sal horen, ende aennemen, opten welcken oock alle patriarchen gesien, ghebouwet, ende ghehoopt, ende alle van desen geestelijcken steen gedroncken, ende van dit broodt des Hemels oft man, een selve spijse ende dranck ghegeten ende ghedroncken hebben."

[104] Ibidem, [31r]–[31v].

> belief of the Trinity, and other such things, likewise the substance [. ..] of baptism.[105]

Despite all the abuses in the Catholic Church, it had retained the substance of the true church, "as a thousand pounds of dross having only a grain of gold in it, has no power to turn the gold to dross." The Reformed Church could not possibly, according to Coornhert, be identified as this one, true, universal church. "For what is one cannot be two, and can have no dissent within it while it remains in unity." In other words: the Reformed had removed themselves from the tradition of the true church. Coornhert tried to cut off all lines of retreat the ministers might seek. Should they claim that they were not one with the Catholic Church in form, but in substance, Coornhert had his reply ready. How could they claim to be both deformed and reformed? [106]

According to Coornhert this meant that the ministers claimed a different substance for their own church than for the Catholic Church. This introduced division and provided Christ as it were with two brides, "one of them ugly and deformed, but the other fair and reformed." Coornhert abhorred this "bigamy" of Christ, just as he abhorred the ministers for creating two different "bodies" of Christ by setting up their church. According to Coornhert this was entirely contrary to Scripture. In ever more peremptory and fiercer terms, Coornhert worked up to the climax of his argument: "must it not necessarily follow from such aforesaid sayings of the ministers themselves [. ..] that the ministers' church is a false church without substance, to wit reformed in appearance, but in truth an insubstantial shadow of a church?"[107] The Catholic Church had the substance of the true church, but not the form; the Reformed Church had the form of a church, but lacked the substance. Thus, Coornhert triumphantly concluded, he had demonstrated the proposition he had submitted to Tilius and proved the Reformed Church to be no church at all. [108]

---

[105] Ibidem, [31v]: "Die principaelste stucken vande leere ende openbare belijdinge vandien, begrepen inde twaelf articulen des geloofs is noch al vander apostolen tijden af gebleven byde Roomsche kercke, oock mede die rechte leere vande drievuldicheyt, ende meer andere dergelijcken, insgelijx die substantie [. ..] vanden dope."

[106] Ibidem, [31v]–[32r].

[107] Ibidem, [32r]: "moet [. ..] niet nootlijck volghen wt sulck voorgaende segghen der ministeren selve, [. ..] dat der ministeren kercke een valsche kercke sonder substantie sy, te weten inden schijn een gereformeerde, maer inder waerheydt een wesentlose ende schaduwelijcke kercke?"

[108] Ibidem, [32r].

Coornhert's account says that at this Cornelisz began "to fidget, flushed in his cheeks [and] assumed a strange expression."[109] Coornhert's explanation of this was that Cornelisz was struck dumb by the recognition that Coornhert had won. Thus it was Donteclock who had to take his place, but he too—still according to Coornhert—could produce little of significance. "Cogitating, coughing and hemming", with "mumbling and stumbling", he spoke for an hour and a half "into the pen" (meaning that minutes were still being taken).[110] In his account of the proceedings Coornhert does not, however, report what Donteclock actually said. He simply notes that the session went into recess at eleven in the morning, after a prayer from Cornelisz.

Because the minutes of this day's disputation are lacking, we do not know how Donteclock reacted to Coornhert's flagrant breach of the order of debate.[111] More than a year afterwards the ministers tried to correct Coornhert's interpretation. Cornelisz had not been struck dumb, but had failed to follow the convolutions of Coornhert's reasoning, so that his reply was beside the point and Donteclock had been forced to intervene.[112] The latter had asked Coornhert for clarification and had then kept the floor. Coornhert had, however, clearly succeeded in making things difficult for the ministers. It looks as though Cornelisz had become angry and had then found it hard to concentrate on Coornhert's further remarks. In any case it is apparent that the ministers wanted to reply to Coornhert, even though he had departed so completely from their *status quaestionis*. This is surprising, given the formal position they had taken until then. The public nature of the disputation was again paying off for Coornhert. Now that he had launched his attack, it had to be met for fear of losing face. Whatever the response of the ministers, Coornhert had said what he had come to say and considered his account settled.

---

[109] Ibidem.

[110] Ibidem, [32r]–[32v].

[111] Ibidem, [30r].

[112] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 259r. In answer to a letter from Coornhert the ministers stated: "For when you had dictated a full sheet of paper, and Arnoldus began to reply to the same *ex tempore*, Donteclock realized from the notes that he had taken down from your mouth, that Arnoldus had not understood you (all your affairs being dark and intricate), and therefore the answer not being to the point, he communicated the same to him, and openly said, Brother, let us first know his meaning, and desired the commissioners that it be allowed that you clarify your meaning, which was done. Now since Donteclock had the floor, Arnoldus asked that he continue."

Exit

After the end of the second day's morning session Coornhert was intoxicated with a sense of triumph. The ministers had tried to silence him, or so he assumed, but their efforts had been in vain. He had not allowed his wings to be clipped by the *status quaestionis* imposed, but had arrogated the liberty of declaring the Reformed Church a false church. The commissioners had not dared intervene for fear of revealing their own partiality. They had even granted Coornhert permission—albeit under pressure and only for the duration of the morning—to use the names of Calvin and Beza. He had gone on to refer to their doctrine. [113] By making these concessions the commissioners had given Coornhert the room he needed for a public attack on the public church. From their point of view, a worse outcome to the disputation would be hard to imagine.

The presence of a sizeable audience had strengthened Coornhert's hand, and he used this advantage to the full. The commissioners were particularly grieved that he had demanded to see their terms of reference "before the people". [114] Coornhert in all likelihood made this demand early on the morning of 15 April as a way of forcing them to allow him to mention Calvin and Beza by name. The strategy was successful. It appears that the commissioners would rather make such a concession than publicly reveal their 'partial' terms of reference. They nevertheless greatly resented Coornhert's insolence. He had blackmailed them before the eyes of the people, and they considered him to have snubbed their authority.

On the second day of the debate there was another confrontation between Coornhert and the commissioners. After the end of the morning session, Coornhert deliberately provoked them. That afternoon it would be his turn to respond to Donteclock's replies. One wonders whether Coornhert could see any point in doing so. The chair was likely to keep him on a short leash, and there would be no further opportunity for the grandstanding he had already indulged that morning. The university hall was still full of curious onlookers when Coornhert applied to the commissioners for permission to mention

---

[113] Ibidem, [29v]. Coornhert made a careful distinction between referring in general terms to the teachings of Calvin and Beza, and "citation from their writings". Only the latter had been prohibited.

[114] Ibidem, [32v].

the names of Calvin and Beza in the afternoon. If such permission was not forthcoming, he would depart the city. Could he have been looking for a pretext to leave with honour? The reaction of the commissioners was furious, with threats to inform the States of Coornhert's refusal to obey their commands. He then listed his own grievances about the course of events in Leiden, openly taxing them with a lack of impartiality. "I am here forced to act against those who at my opposing will refuse to side with their own writings." It would be better, he concluded, to take no further part in "this unfitting affair".[115]

That afternoon a packed university hall waited in vain for Coornhert to make his appearance. A messenger was sent to his lodgings, but Coornhert had already boarded the passenger barge to Haarlem.

Coornhert afterwards claimed that the commissioners had made a great show of looking for him, so that his departure would seem like a flight. The end of the disputation in Leiden gave rise to considerable gossip. Coornhert lamented the fact, but also made his own contribution to public perceptions. He circulated the minutes of the disputation, padded out with his own sheets of hand-written commentary ("glosses"). In this commentary he did everything to disguise the fact that he had broken the rules of debate. He had manipulated the discussions so as to be able to make his own points, and had then left the city. Afterwards he presented himself as a victim who only by good fortune had escaped the clutches of the ministers and the commissioners. Coornhert assumed the role of a little David who had faced a mighty Goliath. Thus he hoped to influence public opinion in his favour, but he lost all credit with the ministers and the States. The Leiden debate was the end of whatever mutual respect and confidence had remained.

The controversy had still not died down a year and a half later. In August 1579 Coornhert returned to the attack with an open letter to Cornelisz and Donteclock.[116] This "new assault on the church" circulated in manuscript, and perhaps also in print. It was, in any case,

---

[115] Ibidem, [32v].

[116] The earliest known printed version of this letter appeared as D. V. Coornhert, *Theriakel teghen het venijnighe wroegh-schrift by Arent Cornelisz. ende Reynier Donteclock […] Sendtbrief van D. V. Coornhert, met antwoorde van de twee predikanten te Delft daar op, ende replijc van D. V. Coornhert* (Gouda, 1610). The version followed here is that in Coornhert, *Wercken* II, 257v–267r.

widely known. "Many glory at it", the Dordrecht minister Van der Corput wrote to Cornelisz. [117] The reply of the ministers a short time later was at least as fierce and uncompromising. Both parties stuck to their own interpretation of the events in Leiden. The assertion-and-denial between Coornhert and the ministers had become even broader subsequent to the Leiden debate. The ministers, said Coornhert, were aiming to get the States to implement "draconian, bloody laws" in support of a policy of constraint of conscience. In Leiden both Cornelisz and Donteclock had tried to hide the fact; the ministers had not dared assent openly to the teachings of Calvin and Beza. Nevertheless the Leiden disputation illustrated their wicked plans. The commissioners had abandoned any pretence of impartiality, which was a worrying indication of the religious policy of the States.

Cornelisz and Donteclock doubted whether refuting Coornhert was even necessary. They had taken note of his commentary on the minutes of the Leiden debate, circulating in manuscript, so that it would not be said that "one fool had made more fools." [118] The open letter reached them in August 1579, and reactions among the Reformed were divided.[119] Cornelisz and Donteclock nevertheless continued with their plans and wrote an extensive reply in which they vented their anger at Coornhert's accusations in the strongest terms. They accused Coornhert of "arrogance" and "self-complaisance".[120] The ministers would not reject future involvement of the States in the controversy, but refused outright any further private exchanges with Coornhert, "For we would see it as gaping against an oven." [121]

Thus the ministers brought their polemical engagement with Coornhert to an end. The decision to do so was partly a result of the policy of the States towards Coornhert. In the autumn of 1578 the States had prohibited Coornhert from publishing on religious subjects without prior permission. [122] Coornhert considered this restriction a

---

[117] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 7 September 1579. *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 109.
[118] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 259v.
[119] See pp. 21–22.
[120] Coornhert, *Sendt-brief*, 264r.
[121] Ibidem.
[122] Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 13, 82r–82v. This prohibition was proclaimed following a more specific order issued by the States following the end of the disputation in Leiden (16 April 1578), forbidding Coornhert to circulate the minutes in print. Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, 34r.

direct breach of the liberty of conscience and did not expectpermission for the publication of his theological works to be forthcoming. The States would surely consult a Reformed minister about the contents of his work.[123] That the States were in earnest is apparent from a letter to the magistrates of Haarlem in August 1579, asking them to remind Coornhert of the States' order.[124] As punishment for his open letter to the ministers, the States on 23 August 1579 again prohibited Coornhert from publication. He was given to understand that he was no longer to circulate criticism of the Reformed Church "by mouth or by writing". But that was not all. Coornhert was to refrain from all religious publication in general "on pain that otherwise such will be provided therein, as will be thought most fitting for the peace, quiet and conservation of all good unity within these lands." Should he fail to comply, Coornhert was to be prosecuted as a "perturber of the common peace".[125]

With the religious disputation in Leiden, the controversy between Coornhert and the ministers of Delft had further crystallized into a matter of national interest. Coornhert's premature departure from Leiden meant that the disputation had not offered the outcome that, under the authority of the States, could bring the disquiet to an end. The Coornhert affair was far from over.

[123] D. V. Coornhert, *Brieven-boeck*, letter 94, in *Wercken* III, 145r.
[124] Bonger, *Life and Work*, 76.
[125] NA, HvH, inv. no. 4593; transcription in *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 295.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COORNHERT AFFAIR (II): FROM PAMPHLET TO DISPUTATION

Adrianus Saravia

Adrianus Saravia,[1] a theologian of international renown, was to play the same role in the run-up to the disputation in The Hague as Thomas Tilius had taken in the Leiden debate. In the summer of 1583, a good five years after Coornhert's notorious clash with Cornelisz, Saravia pushed for a follow-up debate, as he managed to get the ministers of Delft to review the controversy with Coornhert in a new light.

When Saravia accepted appointment as a minister in Leiden in the summer of 1582, it was already inevitable that Coornhert and his Reformed opponents would clash again. The brief but fierce controversy about the course of events in the Leiden disputation had subsequently continued to resurface in one way and another. Almost as soon as he arrived in Holland, Saravia was faced with Coornhert's doings. The vitriolic pamphlet *Proeve vande Nederlantsche Catechismo*[2] ("Test of the Dutch Catechism") came out less than a week after Saravia's arrival. The piece caused considerable commotion in Reformed circles, and within the year had led to a public disputation in The Hague.

Saravia's arrival in Leiden was in part due to the military course of the Revolt. With Parma's campaign of reconquest looming, Ghent was too close to the front line for Saravia's comfort. He sought a safe haven in Leiden. His choice of refuge was partly due to the university being located there.[3] Saravia was an academic, a theologian looking for

---

[1] *BWNG* III, 260–265; *Lexicon* II, 382–387; Woltjer, *De Leidse universiteit*, 10–11; Otterspeer, *Groepsportret* I, 145–147.

[2] D. V. Coornhert, *Proeve vande Nederlantsche catechismo, omme te verstaen of die voort gecomen is wte godlijcke schrift, dan wt het menschelijcke vernuft* ([Haarlem] 1582). Paul Valkema Blouw attributes the press work to Haarlem printer Anthonis Ketel; see *Typographia Batava, 1541–1600: Repertorium van boeken gedrukt in Nederland tussen 1541 en 1600*, ed. A. C. Schuytvlot (Nieuwkoop, 1998) no. 1246.

[3] Willem Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia (c.1532–1613): Dutch Calvinist, First Reformed Defender of the English Episcopal Church Order on the Basis of the Ius Divinum*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 21 (Leiden, 1980), 49.

answers to the burning issues of the day in the wake of the apparently irreparable shattering of the unity of the *corpus christianum*. There was a crisis of authority in the Church, and the balance of power between church and state had been disrupted. [4]

It is difficult to categorize Saravia's theology in a few words. Nijenhuis sees him as a protagonist of a "catholic Calvinism". [5] This makes Saravia very difficult to pigeon-hole, especially in light of Nijenhuis's comment that seventeenth-century "distinctions and divisions" cannot be read back into sixteenth-century theology.[6] In his intellectual biography, Nijenhuis does not present Saravia as a systematic thinker. He describes how this theologian, originally from Artois, moved in circles of highly-placed magistrates and theologians on both sides of the English Channel. In the course of the conflicts that he became involved in, he developed a fundamental attitude to theology in which the Apostolic Church and the writings of the Church Fathers had a normative function.[7] He justified the Anglican episcopal hierarchy on grounds of *vetus consuetudo*, seeing this as the basis from which the crisis of authority within the Church could be solved. [8]

Saravia did not have the reputation of being a dissident theologian. Nijenhuis emphasizes that although Saravia's positions "did not differ on any essential point" from mainstream Reformed positions, he was ultimately more at home in the emerging Anglican "via media". [9] His anti-Presbyterianism was certainly a deviation from "continental Reformed theology", but it was an attitude rooted in a strong (ecclesiastical) historical awareness that could be found in all aspects of Reformed thought. Saravia held that the reform of the church should not be at the expense of consensus and harmonious relations between secular and ecclesiastical authority. In his view, the Anglicans had found a desirable mean between the errors of Rome and the radicalism of certain Protestant movements. [10] This does not make Saravia an opportunist, pragmatic or even 'middle-of-the-roader'. He never sug-

---

[4] Nijenhuis, *Saravia*, 163–165.
[5] Ibidem, 180.
[6] Ibidem, 165. See too W. Nijenhuis, "Variations within Dutch Calvinism in the Sixteenth Century," in *Ecclesia reformata* 2 (Leiden, 1972), 163–182.
[7] Ibidem, 192.
[8] Ibidem, 235. Saravia's defence of the episcopal church order can be found in his *De diversis ministrorum Evangelii gradibus* (London, 1590).
[9] Ibidem, 192.
[10] Ibidem, 212.

gested that theological positions should be sacrificed to unity. On the contrary, the fundamental premise of Saravia's thinking and behaviour was the original accord between the unity of the Church and the purity of its doctrine. Only a pure, historically accurate interpretation of doctrine in the light of scripture could restore lost unity to the Church. [11] Any theological view that had the opposite effect, Saravia abhorred as radicalism.

At William of Orange's insistence, negotiations for Saravia's appointment in Leiden began in the summer of 1582. The Prince even conducted a personal interview with Saravia, who (around 1568) had served him as an army preacher in very hard times. The general assumption was that as an erudite and subtle theologian, Saravia would be able to maintain the delicate balance between Leiden's consistory and the city government. After a period of considerable unrest (the so-called 'Coolhaes affair') the city needed a man who would be respected by all sides. The difficulties in Leiden had had serious repercussions for the religious life of the whole province, so that expectations of Saravia's arrival were pitched high even outside Leiden. [12]

Saravia would not disappoint his patrons. It was not long before the provincial synod called upon his aid in an internal doctrinal conflict. In the course of 1582 it looked likely that a row would blow up around Hieronymus Hortensius (1541–1596), [13] minister in The Hague. For years synods had seen concerns expressed about Hortensius's doctrinal views on justification and righteousness. Fellow ministers cast doubts on his orthodoxy. The publication of a letter in which Hortensius defended his theological opinions brought matters to a head. [14] The Synod of South Holland (held at The Hague in June 1583) decided to intervene. Hortensius was to be questioned by Saravia in the presence of a number of members of the synod. The gentlemen discussed free will, predestination, and perhaps most controversially, justification. The outcome of the "hearing" was straightforwardly in Hortensius's favour. Saravia informed the synod that Hortensius was innocent of heterodoxy. Only on the point of double predestination were his

[11] Ibidem, 234–235.
[12] Ibidem, 46–50.
[13] *BWPG* IV, 316–322; *NNBW* VIII, 853–855.
[14] This letter is printed in Bor, *Oorsprongk, begin, en vervolgh der Nederlandsche oorlogen, beroerten, en borgerlycke oneenigheden* II (Amsterdam, 1680), 511–515.

views at odds with more general Reformed teaching, and on Saravia's authority this was seen as no obstacle to Hortensius's reconciliation. [15]

Nijenhuis points up Saravia's moderation in doctrinal affairs and his unlegalistic, even flexible approach to the confessions of faith. This also applied to the Heidelberg Catechism. Saravia did not see it as necessary for ministers to subscribe to this doctrinal document point by point, from A to Z. [16] His success with Hortensius cannot, however, be attributed solely to a tactical application of the much exercised distinction between the teachings necessary to salvation (*necessaria*) and matters of secondary importance (*adiaphora*). Saravia could get to the heart of the controversy with Hortensius and closely circumscribe the extent of the difference of opinion. He could clarify to Hortensius those points where his views coincided with the generally accepted Reformed teaching on human sanctification. In short, he subtly made it his business to seek agreement with Hortensius and to allay his criticisms.

The views of dissident ministers such as Hortensius could not simply be waved away or trivialized. They had far too many followers to be ignored. Precisians like the Amsterdam minister Petrus Ambrosius, the man behind the campaign to excommunicate Hortensius, ultimately got nowhere with the synod. The Hortensius affair is worth a closer look, as there are a number of striking similarities to the Coornhert affair. Both men ran afoul of Reformed ministers who made them out to be "perfectists" and "Pelagians". In the course of 1583 both Hortensius and Coornhert found themselves facing Saravia. This parallel shows that criticisms such as those voiced by Coornhert were also emanating from within the Reformed Church. Coornhert cannot be seen as an eccentric in the religious life of his time. In the ecclesiological debate he had loudly taken up a position outside the public church, but his views on justification were not as distinctive as this might lead one to suppose. The Reformed Church, as represented by the synod, was hoping to keep ministers like Hortensius on board. Saravia's success in the Hortensius affair made it seem a viable proposal to attempt to find an accommodation with Coornhert, which is what the disputation in The Hague amounted to.

---

[15] Nijenhuis, *Saravia*, 71–72.
[16] Ibidem, 75.

Like Coornhert, Hortensius was a gifted wordsmith. Opponents of this popular preacher did not doubt his assertion that in The Hague he preached daily on matters touching justification and predestination. With colourful language he sought to win over his hearers to his teaching. It was reported that he had compared imputed grace to "a dish of food" from which the reborn Christian could eat endlessly. As long as he was not full, food was "imputed" to him—as though he had already eaten it. Ultimately the moment would have to come that the eater really was full: the stage of perfection. Hortensius's firm conviction was "that people here on earth having become a new creature can perfectly keep what God has commanded."[17] The classis of Amsterdam was scandalized at this manifest "perfectism". Hortensius's view was considered incompatible with the doctrine of forensic justification according to which God's grace clothed the Christian, who in essence remained a sinner. The Christian could only claim to be sinless before God (*coram Deo*), not sinless in fact. The doctrine of predestination was another target of Hortensius's preaching. This "horrible" doctrine, he said, made all preaching "monkeying". [18]

A number of ministers in Amsterdam sent off an urgent letter to the classis of The Hague calling for disciplinary measures to be taken against Hortensius. They saw it as up to the ministers of The Hague to call Brother Hortensius to order and safeguard the "maintenance of the confession of these countries". By this means, the ministers of Amsterdam sought to settle disquiet within their own congregations. Hortensius, even while preaching in Amsterdam and Naarden, had at the time openly proclaimed his heterodox views. The classis of Amsterdam would give Hortensius no room for manoeuvre. He was simply branded a disciple of Coornhert and Castellio. This elevated his perfectism to a fundamental theological principle. Emphasis was placed on the "evil consequence" of such a doctrine, which entailed a perverse view of, in turn, free will, predestination, justification, original sin, and the work of God. [19]

Saravia took a very different approach to his exchange with Hortensius in June 1583. He tried to draw the sting of the difference

---

[17] Hilbrandus Cunaeus Phrisius and Johannes Hallius (on behalf of the classis of Amsterdam) to the classis of The Hague, 18 June 1582, NA, Archief van de particuliere synode van Zuid-Holland, (1566), 1579–1816 (Part. Synode ZH), inv. no. 657, fo. 79.

[18] Ibidem.

[19] Ibidem.

of opinion concerning predestination. When the question of "eternal damnation" was left out of account, the two parties could be reconciled. There was, apparently, no essential difference of opinion concerning predestination as "eternal election". As double predestination had not yet crystallized into being the touchstone of Calvinist orthodoxy, Saravia's strategy is hardly surprising. The doctrine of forensic justification was considerably more sensitive, but here too Saravia's mediation led to a solution.

Just like his fellow ministers from Delft, Cornelisz and Donteclock, who had been controverting perfectibility with Coornhert as early as 1577,[20] Saravia reduced the issue at stake in the Hortensius affair to a difference of opinion about the exact moment of human perfectibility, namely before or after death. This did not, however, provide an answer to Hortensius's suggestion that the doctrine of imputed justification neglected the renewal of the inner man. Saravia managed to convince Hortensius that he had not made it sufficiently clear that justification was not a twofold procedure, but was produced singly and solely by grace imputed in Christ. Reformed doctrine was marked by a strict conceptual distinction between the justification and the sanctification of the believer.[21] Hortensius had to confess his error in identifying the believer's justification with their sanctification, among other places in his simile of the person eating. He also stated that it had never been his intention to proclaim perfectist opinions. Hortensius had only wanted to emphasize the fact that "a Christian person needs not only the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to him in faith, but also renewal of life."[22]

So-called perfectism seemed to be inextricably tied up with a particular explanation of the operation of divine grace in the justification of a believer. The *iustitia inhaerens*, of which Hortensius was a proponent, was characteristic of the medieval doctrine of grace, rooted

---

[20] Cornelisz, *Antwoordt*, 40–48.

[21] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei. A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1998), 188–190.

[22] *Memorien van de acten ghedaen ende gehouden inden Suijdthollantschen particulieren synode in Sgravenhaghe begonnen den 7 iunij 1583* , NA, Part. Synode ZH, inv. no. 278, fo. 17v: "een christen mensche neffens de gherechticheijt Christi, die hem door den gheloove toegherekent wordt, oock de nieuwicheijt des levens moet hebben." Compare *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* , vol. 2, *Noord-Holland, 1618–1620; Zuid-Holland, 1574–1592*, ed. J. Reitsma and S. D. van Veen (Groningen, 1893), 253–254.

in Augustine's teachings and reformulated at the Council of Trent. This doctrine attributed the justification of the believer to a directly "transforming" operation of grace. [23] By accepting a fundamental distinction between (forensic) justification and (intrinsic) sanctification, Hortensius was distancing himself from this view and reconciling himself to Reformed teaching. With this distinction, the believer's sanctification was separated from the justification (grace) imputed. God's grace was limitless (as Hortensius had tried to express with his "dish of food"), but did not actually transform the human person it was imputed to. Hortensius's perfectism, simply a logical consequence of his initial understanding of grace (God's limitless, imparted grace must at some stage lead to perfection), was thus successfully defused. Saravia could therefore convince the synod that the minister had been found to be orthodox. Hortensius subscribed to the Belgic Confession of 1561, "repudiating and detesting all contrary doctrines, such as those of Pelagius, Castellion, and other such, teaching against the ground of truth of these aforesaid points and articles." [24]

The outcome of the Hortensius affair does raise the question of the sincerity of Hortensius's declaration to the synod. Had he really been convinced that his interpretation of the doctrine of justification was faulty, or was he only paying lip service to a theological doctrine that happened to have been elevated into a point of orthodoxy by the circles in which he found himself? There is reason enough to suspect a degree of pragmatism on Hortensius's part. The synod had the power to depose him from his living. Saravia offered Hortensius a way to return to good standing with the synod without too much loss of face. What was there to keep him from returning to his congregation the following day and again proclaiming his former perfectist opinions?

The day-to-day practicalities of Hortensius's activity as a pastor of souls may offer an alternative explanation for his pliable attitude at

---

[23] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 23–91; Concilium Tridentinum, Decretum de iustificatione (1547), cap. 7: "Non est sola peccatorum remissio, sed et sanctificatio et renovatio interioris hominis. [. . .] Demum unica formalis causa est iustitia Dei, non qua ipse iustus est, sed qua nos iustos facit, qua videlicet ab eo donati renovamur spiritu mentis nostrae, et non modo reputamur, sed vere iusti nominamur et sumus." H. Denzinger ed., *Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 32nd ed. (Freiburg, 1963), 371.

[24] NA, Part. Synode ZH, inv. no. 120, fos. 17v–18r: "verwerpende ende detesterende alle contrarie leeringhe, als Pelagii, Castellionis, ende andere derghelijcken, die teghen den grondt der waerheijt van dese voorsz poincten ende artijckelen leeren."

the synod. His subscription to orthodoxy left him—in the absence of doctrinal uniformity—plenty of room to exhort his parishioners about their duty to make an effort to do good. The Reformed doctrine of justification may have been deliberately anti-Pelagian: the negligible human person had to be saturated with an awareness that justification was solely the work of an almighty God. [25] Nevertheless, even Reformed theologians spoke of the sanctification (*sanctificatio*) of the believer as a process of *inner* renewal. This sanctification, however, was a separate, simultaneous operation, clearly distinguished from the act of (forensic) justification.

In the "conversation" between Saravia and Hortensius the exact relationship between human justification and sanctification was left vague. In Reformed doctrine this was something of a grey area, in which ministers such as Hortensius had to find their own way. With the aim of advancing the "well living" of his congregation, Hortensius had resorted to preaching infused grace. This is not to say that Hortensius proposed a soteriology of merited salvation, but it is certain that he saw the individual believer as having an active role in bringing their new life in Christ to fruition. If formulated carefully, this was something few Reformed preachers would have disagreed with.

The idea of perfectibility to be found in Hortensius was an antidote to the sterility of imputed righteousness. The minister knew that he was going too far—so much is clear from his exchange with Saravia—but probably could see no other way to make clear to his hearers that God's saving grace acted directly upon its recipient. Saravia exhibited to Hortensius the main lines of accepted doctrine, but in practice a number of variations were possible within these limits. Hortensius had crossed the line, but this did not keep Saravia from giving him room to reformulate to his own satisfaction his answer to the important question of how God's grace worked through into daily life.

At the provincial synod, Saravia made it clear that Hortensius's perfectism derived from a view of human justification that could not be reconciled to Reformed doctrine. He called Hortensius to order; the

---

[25] McGrath does not consider this anti-Pelagianism a *distinctive* criterion of Reformed doctrine. Although a certain view of justification—in an anti-Pelagian direction—excluded any human cooperation with grace, McGrath sees it as only being distinctively Protestant when there is a separation between justification and sanctification or when the emphasis is placed on the extrinsic operation of divine grace. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 190.

minister was receptive to Saravia's appeal to the principles of Reformed doctrine. In Coornhert's case such a strategy would be more difficult to put into effect. Hortensius was a Reformed minister; Coornhert operated outside the Church and owed no loyalty to its doctrines.

Narrow Margins

When Saravia arrived in Leiden in November 1582, the Coornhert affair had been rumbling on for years. In the eyes of ministers such as Cornelisz and Donteclock it was a *historia calamitatum* into which they would rather not breathe new life. After 1579 they only reacted to Coornhert's writings when these were circulated anonymously or were brought to their attention by third parties. [26] They avoided any direct confrontation. The repressive policy that the States had adopted towards dissidents such as Coornhert also induced reticence. Coornhert had been forbidden from writing on religion, and his opponents had to refrain from arguing with a man who was gagged. Nobody would have predicted a new religious disputation. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1583 it transpired that there was room for public debate. Saravia was able to convince the States to appoint an ad hoc committee to find a solution to the Coornhert affair. He was, however, operating within very narrow margins, for a religious disputation in The Hague was hardly the obvious solution. A short review of the years after the collapse of the Leiden disputation in April 1578 will show how the fear of public disturbances both prevented public religious debate while at the same time—paradoxically—keeping alive the belief that a religious disputation could serve civil harmony.

Nicolaas van der Laan, a regent of Haarlem and an important deputy to the States of Holland, abhorred Coornhert's noisy way of venting criticism of the Reformed Church. Nevertheless, Van der Laan encouraged debate with his fellow citizen of Haarlem, in the hope that it would calm tempers in a controversy that touched the foundations of the country's political and religious order. Van der Laan was a veteran of the magistracy of Haarlem and was considered a champion of the Reformed Church. Coornhert reposed complete trust in him,

---

[26] An exception was the treatise *Ondersoeck des onghehoorden middels, onlancx versiert ende uitghegheven door D. V. Coornhert* (Delft, 1582), a reaction to Coornhert's *Middel tot mindringhe* (Haarlem, 1581).

and the two enjoyed debating religious questions together. Coornhert portrays him as a prudent regent, who considered the maintenance of public peace a matter of the first importance.[27]

Shortly after the conclusion of the disputation in Leiden, Coornhert was summoned before the magistrates of Haarlem. The city fathers communicated to him on behalf of the States the order to refrain from further controversy for the sake of "the country's quiet and peace". Coornhert was furthermore informed that the States had issued a ban on the publication of the minutes of the Leiden debate.[28] Bor reports at some length a petition that Coornhert directed to the States in November 1578, mentioning these prohibitions. Although Coornhert's behaviour had been "so silent, so peaceable and so wholly innocent", he complained that he was still being vilified from the pulpit. He appealed to the States to put an end to the slander of the Reformed. Coornhert feared that his position in Holland would become untenable, even using the word "unsafe". He asked to be allowed to address the assembly of the States for a quarter of an hour to prove his innocence. Should this be impossible, or should the States prove unwilling to protect his civil rights or to declare the conditions of the Pacification of Ghent—in particular the guarantee of freedom of conscience—applicable to him, then he requested permission to go into exile once more. It is clear that Coornhert was looking for a way to re-engage his religious opponents. The States, however, would not be moved. Coornhert was given to understand that his safety would be assured, in accordance with the Pacification, as long as he refrained from unauthorized publications on religious issues. For religious publications the prior permission of the States would always be necessary.[29]

Bearing this order from the States in mind, Coornhert would henceforth seek the mediation of Van der Laan when returning to arena of religious controversy. He openly discussed his criticism of the States with Van der Laan: "I make free to say that the States of Holland are beginning to constrain consciences", giving his own case in evidence.[30]

---

[27] Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwangh*, 469r.
[28] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, 34r.
[29] Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 13, 82r–82v.
[30] Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwangh*, 469r: "soo ist my vry te seggen dat die Staten van Hollandt den dwang hinder conscientien beginnen ende dat aen my selve."

Coornhert also tried out a number of his writings on this friend.[31] He made grateful use of what protection Van der Laan could offer him. In the controversy on the Heidelberg Catechism, Coornhert shielded himself behind the announcement that Van der Laan had encouraged him to read it. In reaction to the failure of the Leiden disputation, the latter had allegedly proposed in the assembly of the States that this basic Calvinist text should be the basis for future disputation. When this came to Coornhert's ear in January 1579, he had at once taken up the Catechism, "which [. ..] he had never read."[32] The Catechism had been circulating in the Netherlands since the 1560s, however, so Coornhert must already have had some notion of its contents. It is clear that he was doing whatever he could to shift responsibility for his attack on the Catechism on to a person in authority who enjoyed the trust of the States.

In the short treatise *Vande erf-sonde* ("On original sin"), Coornhert set out his arguments against the Catechism.[33] The heart of his argument was that the Catechism's treatment of original sin was irreconcilable with the Bible. As a sequel to the debate in Leiden, Coornhert's aim in raising this issue was to demonstrate that the Reformed Church was a false church, unable to prove its doctrines from scripture. The polemic that Coornhert launched in 1579 can be considered a continuation of the Leiden debate by other means.

Coornhert sent his *Vande erf-sonde*, a manuscript treatise, to Van der Laan, with the request that it be sent on to "those who are presumed to be able to maintain the Catechism."[34] He was ultimately hoping for a disputation with Reformed ministers from Leiden University.[35] Van der Laan was willing to go so far as to mediate a private meeting.[36]

---

[31] In 1580 Van der Laan advised Coornhert to present his *Middel tot mindringhe* (1581) to the prince of Orange. Ultimately this did not happen, as in various ways "inopportune". D. V. Coornhert, "Aen mijne E. heeren de burghermeesteren ende vroedtschappen der stede Haerlem," in *Wercken* II, 582r-582v.

[32] D. V. Coornhert, *Van de erfzonde. Disputatie tusschen de predicanten tot Haarlem, ende D. V. Coornhert* (Gouda, 1610) 1.

[33] D. V. Coornhert, *Vande erf-sonde. Of die in de H. Schrifture soo wert bevonden als inden Catechismus en by eenige predicanten geleert wert* , in *Wercken* II, 550v–555v.

[34] Coornhert, *Vande erf-sonde*, 550v.

[35] Coornhert, *Van de erfzonde*, 1.

[36] The minutes of this debate were published in 1610, printed by Tournay in Gouda: Coornhert, *Van de erfzonde. Disputatie tusschen de predicanten tot Haarlem, ende D. V. Coornhert* (Gouda, 1610).

On 6 February 1579 he made his home available for an informal debate between Coornhert and two ministers, Johannes Damius and a colleague who is not identified in the sources.[37] A number of Haarlem regents attended, including Thomas Thomaszoon, another important deputy to the States.[38]

After a long afternoon's debate the parties had not come any closer to one another. Damius, reeling from the encounter, referred Coornhert to Leiden University. There they would know how to answer him. "My office will not allow me, I have too much to do", said Damius.[39] As it turned out, however, Coornhert would not be able to get the academics to agree to a debate.

Coornhert's position in these years was, to put it mildly, remarkable. He moved in circles of highly-placed magistrates, who attached importance to his religious opinions even though they did not share them. Van der Laan, for instance, had himself gone over to the Reformed religion. He regarded Coornhert as a stimulating conversational partner, one who challenged him to consider the fundamental problem of religious division more closely. Van der Laan would not exercise force in religious matters, but at the same time refused to accept a situation of religious division, which above all else touched God's honour.[40] He discussed with Coornhert what means of restoring unity were permissible. Van der Laan repeatedly put his friend in touch with Reformed ministers, perhaps hoping that the sharpness of Coornhert's line of reasoning would force the more intransigent among them into adopting less unaccommodating positions.

When intellectual debate moved to less informal settings, even to an explicitly political context, there was still a role for Coornhert. In 1579 he composed an important document for the city government of Leiden, known as the Leiden Justification.[41] The magistrates wanted the piece to justify a certain measure of government intervention in ecclesiastical affairs, to maintain order in the religious field. A number of Reformed ministers of Leiden resisted the city government's policy,

---

[37] For Damius (Van Dam) see Spaans, *Haarlem na de reformatie*, 83, 86.
[38] Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland*, 252.
[39] Coornhert, *Van de erfzonde*, 10r–10v.
[40] Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwangh*, 470r.
[41] [D. V. Coornhert], *Justificatie des magistraets tot Leyden in Hollant* (Leiden, 1579).

alleging that it infringed upon church powers. This resulted in a lengthy conflict now known as the 'Coolhaes affair'.[42]

Despite his close ties to regents, Coornhert continually feared that the States would take punitive measures against him. He saw his freedom of action increasingly restricted by a series of prohibitions emanating from the authorities. When he tried to restart the polemic with the Delft ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock in September 1579, he received another serious reprimand from the States. They ordered the magistrates of Haarlem to make clear to Coornhert that he was on no condition to express himself against the public church, "by mouth or by writing". They prohibited him in general from "printing or disseminating any writings or declarations touching the matter of religion." Should he breach these orders, Coornhert would be prosecuted as a "disturber of the public peace", which could lead to imprisonment or banishment.[43]

Coornhert received some reassurance in a conversation with Van der Laan. "Your case did not go forward", the regent informed him.[44] It is likely that Van der Laan meant that the city magistrates of Haarlem had not yet given ear to the resolution of the States. For the present Coornhert was safe, but it was clear to him that repressive measures from the States could be imposed at any moment. A direct attack on the Reformed ministers was now out of the question. Coornhert could only hope that the dissatisfaction spread by his pamphlets would provoke the ministers into making the first open move. The strategy worked, unleashing a new polemic between Coornhert and the Delft ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock in 1580–1581. A year later, Coornhert became embroiled in a vitriolic controversy with the Leiden professor Lambertus Danaeus.

The debate on original sin provoked the Delft ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock—much against their inclination—to renew their contact with Coornhert. This written controversy began in June 1580 through the mediation of a third party. Coornhert asserted that there was dissatisfaction among the Reformed in Delft concerning the refusal of

---

[42] Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 230–231; Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 75–78.

[43] Coornhert to an anonymous addressee, [after 9 October 1579], *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 294.

[44] Coornhert, *Vanden aengheheven dwangh*, 471v; *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 295.

Cornelisz and Donteclock to enter into debate with him. [45] It is possible that the initiative to this so-called 'original sin polemic' arose in these circles.

The mutual mistrust of the parties was unabated, which prevented any easy progress. Although Coornhert's identity as the author of the treatise on original sin must have been widely known, the ministers would only debate an anonymous opponent. [46] In this way they hoped to avoid a personal confrontation, as had occurred in the aftermath of the Leiden debate. Coornhert was no less apprehensive, and sought assurances that the ministers would not get him into trouble with the States. To this end he set out a number of conditions on paper, to all but one of which the ministers were willing to agree.

Coornhert got them to concede to the printing of the polemic after its conclusion and also to promise not to make a complaint to the States against him. He also got them to confirm these concessions in writing.[47] Coornhert did have to give way with regard to the topic of the polemic. The ministers refused to agree to a debate on the question "whether the authorities can legally kill any for religion's sake", as Coornhert had proposed. They wanted to treat the doctrine of original sin first, even though Coornhert regarded this as a side issue.[48] Nevertheless, Cornelisz and his companions went some way towards meeting their opponent's wishes by not ruling out in advance that the issue of hereticide might be raised. After debating original sin the ministers would be wiling to address a number of other questions, such as free will and justification. To conclude, they would deal with "the power of the government against the disturbers of the church." [49]

---

[45] D. V. Coornhert, *Van de erf-zonde, schulde, ende straffe. Duplijck van D. V. Coornhert. Opte replijck vande predicanten aen henluyden den 15 Mey 1581 overghelevert*, in *Wercken* II, 408v.

[46] In 1583 the ministers attested to the States that they had not initially been aware of their opponent's identity in the polemic on original sin. Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 6–7.

[47] A copy of the letter of the ministers (27 June 1580) is included in D. V. Coornhert, *Vande vreemde sonde, schulde, straffe nasporinghe. Waer inne naecktelijck werdt ontdeckt de rechte grondt ende oorsake vande schadelijcke doolinghen gheslopen in de leeringhen van de vrye-wille, predestinatie ende justificatie*, in *Wercken* II, 483r. The original was signed by Cornelisz, Donteclock and Pieter Jansz.

[48] Coornhert, *Van de erf-zonde, schulde, ende straffe*, 408v.

[49] Coornhert, *Vande vreemde sonde, schulde, straffe*, 483r.

The debate on original sin turned out to be enormously extensive. [50] It seems, if such were possible, to have driven the parties even further apart than they had been already. Coornhert complained of the slowness with which the ministers responded to his writings; the ministers afterwards mocked "Coornhert's copiousness in filling so much paper."[51] They, however, were as much to blame as he for the proliferation of arguments. The ministers' initial response to Coornhert's brief treatise on original sin was already 37 pages long.[52] Cornelisz and his comrades attached great importance to this polemic, which they wished to have printed "for the profit and utility of the readers".[53] Coornhert must have been an opponent of exceptional calibre. Although the ministers wished to avoid a confrontation with Coornhert, they could not resist the lure of each new turn in the Coornhert affair. Coornhert was even able to set conditions for how they would engage him in debate.

Coornhert's self-assurance is hard to reconcile with the prohibitions the States had laid upon him. The obvious assumption is that Coornhert could apply a certain degree of pressure because he was speaking for a wider constituency. The assumed popularity of his work cannot be demonstrated from evidence of print runs or of reception, quite simply because we have none. Nevertheless, a number of remarks made by the ministers indicate that Coornhert's views were seen as representing a wider threat to the Reformed Church. His masterful ability to "bedizen" his views meant that believers were easily "ensnared" by his teachings. The ministers did, however, have to acknowledge that Coornhert's success was not due entirely to superficialities. Those who applied themselves earnestly to religious questions proved not immune to Coornhert's viewpoints. The ministers stated with concern that "there were also those who, not without great imprudence, began to stray from healthful doctrine." [54]

---

[50] The polemic died out in February 1583, with the ministers transmitting an incomplete reply to Coornhert's rejoinder. The ministers stated that they were waiting until after publication of Coornhert's book to write the second part of their reply. This presumably refers to Coornhert's *Proeve vande Nederlantsche Catechismo*. Coornhert, *Vande vreemde sonde, schulde, straffe*, 482v.

[51] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 7.

[52] Cornelisz, *Replique op Cornh: teghenwerpinghe vand' erfsonde, overghegheven den iiiden Octobris anno 80*, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[53] Coornhert, *Vande vreemde sonde, schulde, straffe*, 483r.

[54] Cornelisz, *Replique op Cornh: teghewerpinghe vand' erfsonde* , GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636, fo. 9. Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 6–7.

The Leiden professor Danaeus felt called to make a contribution to the theological debate. In 1582 he reacted to the anonymous treatise *Vande wterlyke kercke Godes* ("On the visible church of God"), probably written by the Utrecht minister Duifhuis, which included a letter by Coornhert.[55] In this letter Coornhert was critical of those who moved from one church to another "without judgement". Their quest for the "true visible church" was groundless without a grasp of the true faith. Coornhert's advice was, "Do not lay hold of any faith until you have come to a knowledge of truth."[56] The Amsterdam consistory called upon Danaeus to quiet the unrest caused by publications of this sort. Danaeus, like the Delft ministers in 1580, was hoping that his rebuttal would give clarity on disputed theological issues. His intervention, however, created more heat that light, not least because Danaeus dedicated his piece to the magistrates of Amsterdam.[57]

Coornhert's response appeared within a few months.[58] Danaeus had accused Coornhert of "devilish deceit" and could expect a peppery reply. Personal insults rapidly came to dominate the exchange, with neither Danaeus nor Coornhert behindhand. Coornhert showed an express contempt for his opponent's learned status. He would not allow himself to be browbeaten by so much learnedness. There were not even the beginnings of a substantive dialogue between Danaeus and Coornhert on the status of the visible church. This was a mud-slinging contest. In February 1582 Danaeus's equally vitriolic rejoinder appeared, printed in no fewer than a thousand copies.[59]

---

[55] Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 71. [Duifhuis], *Vande wterlyke kercke Godes, waer de selve nu te vinden is ende welcke alleen de rechte is daermen hem by behoort te voeghen, wat leeraers men behoort te geloven* (1581). This treatise has not survived. Because Danaeus had very little Dutch, Amsterdam ministers translated his rejoinder into Dutch. This translation is included in D. V. Coornhert, *Zeepe opte vlecken by Lambert Danaeus […] gestroyt op een sentbrief achter seker boecxken* (Haarlem, 1582). The Latin original appeared in Geneva in 1582 with the title *Ad libellum ab anonymo quodam libertino recens editum, hoc titulo, de externa seu visibili Dei ecclesia* .

[56] Coornhert, *Zeepe opte vlecken*, 55v: "Soo en grijpe geen gheloove aen voor dat ghij ghekomen zijt totter waerheijdts kennisse."

[57] Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius*, 71.

[58] Coornhert, *Zeepe opte vlecken by Lambert Danaeus [. . .] gestroyt op een sentbrief achter seker boecxken* (Haarlem 1582). Because no copies of this edition survive, reference has to be made to the version in Coornhert, *Wercken* III, 50r–57v.

[59] Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius*, 80. The title of Danaeus's response was: *Calx viva, qua Theod. Coornhartii sapo, facile consumitur, et in fumos evanescit* . No copies of this edition have survived. The text is included in Danaeus, *Ad libellum*, 84–95 and in Dutch translation in D. V. Coornhert, *Levende-kalck waarmede Dirijck Koornharts zeepe lichtelijck te niet wert gemaackt ende als eenen roock verdwijnt. Geschreven door*

Exceptionally for this period, Coornhert issued an explicitly anti-Reformed treatise in print. The polemic about original sin had been conducted only in manuscript exchanges. No doubt Coornhert felt in the spring of 1582 that he was justified in reacting in print to a printed challenge from Danaeus, albeit produced in ignorance of his identity. Otherwise he spent his time on treatises commenting on the state of the nation more generally [60] and treatises which addressed theological issues without taking positions explicitly against the Reformed Church.[61] Given the breadth of the prohibitions to which he was already subject, Coornhert was operating on the boundaries of the permissible. He had, after all, been forbidden to publish anything "touching matter of religion" without authorization.

In just these years Coornhert had a large number of his earlier treatises (re)printed. There must have been wide interest in his views on human sanctification. Coornhert's extensive *Vande wedergheboorte* ("On rebirth"), in which he described the various stages of spiritual renewal, appeared in 1581.[62] A year later followed *Vande onwetenheyt* ("On ignorance") and *Van des menschen natuerlijcke vleesch wondersproock* ("A wondrous tale of the natural flesh of mankind").[63] In these treatises, Coornhert offered the reader a very general theological framework, avoiding any theological terminology. Thus he hoped to keep his publications within the "limits of the law". The same was true of a series of plays he authored. This was the period in which Coornhert had many of his dramatic works printed. Anneke Fleurkens speaks of "a real explosion of dramatic editions" in 1582, when four different titles came out. In these plays, too, human sanctification was central, as a process of growth towards a sinless life. [64]

Lambert Daneus Theologus. […] Vertaalt uyt den latijne in neder-Landts door D. V. Coornhert. Die daer by heeft gestelt een korte antwoorde (n.p. 1607).

[60] E.g. Coornhert, *Bedencke vander Nederlanden noodt ende hulpe;* Idem, *Middel tot mindringhe*. This last treatise brought Coornhert dangerously close to a new breach of the prohibition which touched upon "matters of religion" widely.

[61] E.g. Coornhert, *Synodus*.

[62] D. V. Coornhert, *Vande wedergheboorte, hoe die gheschiet, ende waar by de mensch mach sekerlijck weten of die in hem is gheschiet of niet* , in *Wercken* I, 177r–184v.

[63] D. V. Coornhert, *Van de onwetenheyt der menschen, die daer is onschuldigh of schuldigh*, in *Wercken* I, 120r–128v; Idem, *Van des menschen natuerlijcke vleesch wondersproock. Verclarende dat het veel misbruyckt wort, maar nemmermeer self en zondight*, in *Wercken* I, 140r–147r.

[64] Anneke C. G. Fleurkens, "Leren met lust," in *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht*, 83; Fleurkens, *Stichtelijke lust*, 23, 123.

The *Proeve vande Nederlantsche Catechismo* (1582)—the treatise that would give occasion for the disputation in The Hague—should be seen as a sequel to this stream of publications on human sanctification. Coornhert had already, in the polemic on original sin, sharply criticized the Heidelberg Catechism. He had then focused on the doctrine of original sin, and his work had led to an abstract debate with theologically educated opponents. With this new pamphlet, Coornhert was addressing a broad public and linking original sin, which the *Proeve* only even mentions once, to the practical life of faith. According to Coornhert the doctrine as set out in the Catechism could not possibly lead to a true deliverance from evil, as this confessional document was based on an erroneous representation of human nature. The Catechism lacked any biblical foundation and would even make sincere prayer impossible.

In the *Proeve*, as in pamphlets like *Vande wedergheboorte*, Coornhert wrote from the perspective of the ordinary believer. The antithetical structure of the *Proeve*, however, was quite unlike works of this type, which were remarkable for their (supposedly) theologically neutral point of departure and calm, didactic tone. With undisguised pugnacity, Coornhert's *Proeve* takes positions against Reformed doctrine as set out in the Catechism. Furthermore, he dedicated the treatise to the States, giving added weight to the political freight of his case. This change of direction should be seen in relation to a series of measures decreed by the States in the 'book edict' of 20 December 1581. [65] With this proclamation the States not only acted as defenders of the public church, a thus far accustomed role, but also as defenders of Reformed doctrine. Coornhert's *Proeve* called this development into question.

At first sight the 1581 proclamation might seem more of the same. It reinforced the power of the Reformed Church by linking Catholicism and high treason. For fear of "unrest and riot" and of "any hidden understanding with the enemy", the States prohibited the celebration of Mass "in any churches or other private houses", in itself simply repeating "various prior prohibitions and injunctions". [66] At most this intensified existing anti-Catholic measures, with the States now going

---

[65] NA, StvH, inv. no. 16, Res. 20 December 1581; Ingrid Weekhout, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden. De vrijheid van de drukpers in de zeventiende eeuw* (The Hague, 1998), 29–30.

[66] Ibidem. The States had issued their first proclamation against the celebration of Mass in 1573. Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland en de Opstand* , 160.

so far as to forbid monks and nuns from wearing their characteristic garb in public. [67] To prevent "great offence", the Catholicism that was proving so hard to root out would at least be banished from public view.

Of much greater weight were the prohibitions concerning the printing and distribution of "offensive, seditious and scandalous pamphlets, newsbooks, songs, ballads or other such." [68] The States saw such publications endangering public order on a daily basis. The damaging effect of these writings was formulated in the proclamation as follows:

> Such that seditious and unquiet spirits could easily, in these days, bring the ignorant and inexperienced, and the common man, into error, schism and sedition.[69]

The States claimed, while ordering measures to be taken against the celebration of Mass, that they were not seeking to "burden or inquire into the conscience or opinion" of anyone. [70] The explicitly anti-Catholic character of these prohibitions, paradoxical as it may seem, made this claim the more believable. This anti-Catholicism underlined the political reasons given for the measures: war against a Catholic power inevitably led to suspicions against Catholics. The States wanted to suppress all outward manifestations of this religion, but otherwise made no judgement in religious matters.

The prohibitions concerning the printing and distribution of "scandalous" books and writings, which established a system of preventive censorship, were *not* aimed at any particular faith group. [71] The justification given for these measures, too, was the maintenance of public order, but at the same time the proclamation spoke openly of "unquiet spirits" who would promote "error" among the common people. [72] This was a novelty for the government of Holland. The States were imposing censorship not only on the outward manifestation of a single

---

[67] NA, StvH, inv. no. 16, Res. 20 December 1581.

[68] Ibidem.

[69] Ibidem: "Sulcks dat d'onwetende ende onversochte menschen, ende de gemeene man, door d'oproerige ende ongeruste geesten, lichtelijcker tot misverstant, scheuringe ende seditie in desen tijden gebracht souden mogen worden."

[70] Ibidem.

[71] Ibidem. The edict provided that all printed works be submitted to the States for approval. Publication was only permitted once approval was given.

[72] Ibidem.

religion, but on religious ideas and convictions as such.[73] Unity in religion should be attained at a theological level. Were the States finally revealing their true, Reformed face? Had the anti-Catholic attack now created the space for a pro-Reformed defence? Was Reformed doctrine now to be the touchstone of whether any given religious opinion was to be considered an "error"?

Coornhert would have answered all these questions with a resounding 'yes'. In Coornhert's view, the people knew all too well that so-called "disturbers of the ecclesiastical peace" would be identified as critics of Reformed doctrine. In 1582 he claimed that the 1581 edict had reinforced the popular conviction that the authorities were planning to give Reformed doctrines a privileged protection. The proclamation forbade the printing of books without the prior permission of a representative of the States "whom all thought would be of the Reformed religion." Coornhert gave his suspicions a polemical twist by concluding that "the ministers with their petition to the magistrates for such protection of their doctrine [. . .] not very secretly showed that they do not have truth on their side."[74] The proclamation convinced Coornhert that the time was ripe for a new attack on Reformed doctrine.

Coornhert descried an increase in the self-confidence of the ministers as a result of the book edict. He was convinced that the bond between the States and the Reformed Church had grown closer after December 1581. "Formerly whenever anyone asked any of the Reformed why none of their teachers wrote against my printed books on divine permission, they were in the habit of answering that it would be folly to dignify such foolish writings."[75] It was true that the min-

---

[73] According to S. Groenveld the 1581 edict was a result of "repeated pressure from Calvinist synods"; the provisions of the edict are partly aimed against "works disputable on religious grounds." S. Groenveld, "Het Mekka der schrijvers? Statencolleges en censuur in de zeventiende-eeuwse Republiek," in *Eer is het lof des deuchts: Opstellen over renaissance en classicisme aangeboden aan dr. Fokke Veenstra*, ed. H. Duits, A. J. Gelderblom and M. B. Smits-Veldt (Amsterdam, 1986), 228. Compare H. F. K. van Nierop, "Censorship, Illicit Printing and the Revolt of the Netherlands," in *Too Mighty to be Free: Censorship and the Press in Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse, Britain and the Netherlands 9 (Zutphen, 1987), 29.

[74] Coornhert, *Tweede verantwoordinghe eens eenighen sent-briefs*, in *Wercken* III, 323v: "de predicanten met hen-luyder versoeck tot sodanighe magistraets beschermінghe haerder leere [. . .] niet seer bedectelijc betoonden dat sy geen waerheyt over haer zijde en hebben."

[75] Coorhert, *Tweede verantwoordinghe*, 323r: "Als voormaels iemandt tot eenighe vanden gereformeerden plach te vragen, waeromme dat niemand van hen-luyder lee-

isters had not previously responded to Coornhert's publications in print. In the course of 1582 the Delft ministers brought out a response to Coornhert's *Middel tot mindringhe*; the same year saw the bitter polemic between Coornhert and Professor Danaeus. Most remarkable of all was the decision of the Delft ministers to issue a second answer to the letter by Coornhert that had already set Danaeus off. This *Teghenbericht* ("Counter-message") also appeared in print. [76]

The publication of this second riposte to Coornhert's letter, which had been circulated anonymously and according to Coornhert had never been meant for publication in the first place, shows that the controversy with Danaeus had wider repercussions. According to Coornhert the renewed offensive of the Delft ministers left their colleague Danaeus "sitting in his filth unanswered".[77] At the same time he indicated that it was precisely the polemic with Danaeus that had brought the ministers to bring out this new piece against him. The controversy had in the meantime taken on a life of its own, and had become further complicated by the contributions of third parties. Given the considerable print-run of Danaeus's pamphlet against Coornhert, we can assume that this paper war had stirred up passions, and perhaps contributed to unrest. This was also the most important reason for the ministers to take action. Not as a result of the 1581 edict, but from a sense of self-preservation, they had their response to Coornhert printed.

The ministers even felt that by issuing the proclamation the States had made it harder for them to legitimize the Reformed Church as the true Church. If anything, they feared that government intervention would weaken the position of the Reformed. The ministers emphasized that the edict had been drafted and proclaimed "without any incitement of ours". [78] They did not want to give the impression that the Reformed Church could only maintain itself with the aid of the States. They also saw it as nonsense to equate the 'book edict' with synodal censorship decrees. The latter could hardly count as religious

---

raren schreef tegen myne gedruckte boecxkens, vande toelatingheg odes, was men gewoone den selven voorts antwoorde te geven, dattet sotheydt ware, sodanige sotte schriften te waeridigen."

[76] Ibidem, 324r–326v. Cornelisz and Donteclock, *Teghen-bericht op eenen brief, over een wijle ghedruckt achter een boecxken vande uuterlicke kercke godts, sonder den naem des autheurs* (Delft, 1582).

[77] Ibidem, 323.

[78] *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts*, [30].

constraint, since they had no general applicability. Only ministers and teachers (who had subscribed to the confession of the Reformed Church) were obliged to submit their publications on religious issues for approval by the synod or by a Reformed professor of theology. Others were free of any such obligation. [79]

The publication of Coornhert's *Proeve* in November 1582 brought about a change in the attitude of the ministers. In their eyes this public attack on the legitimacy of the Reformed Church, dedicated to the States, required a government response. It was no longer desirable that the States maintain some sort of neutrality. Previously, every government measure against Coornhert had naturally been welcomed, but the ministers did their utmost not to give the impression that the Reformed Church owed its public monopoly entirely to the support of the secular authorities. Coornhert's *Proeve* led to a change of hearts. Now the ministers considered the lack of an explicit statement of support from the States to be damaging. After all, the silence of the States suggested that not only Coornhert, but the government itself was questioning Reformed doctrine.

Proeve

On 8 November 1582 the first copies of the *Proeve vande Nederlantsche Catechismo* came off the press.[80] The full title left no doubt as to the work's intended "test of the Dutch Catechism to understand whether it proceeds from sacred scripture, or from human wit." The treatise was dedicated to the States of Holland and seemed to be written for a broad readership, "as a warning to the political authorities and subjects."[81] The rhetorical framing of this eighty-page pamphlet shows the extent to which Coornhert, as a critic of Reformed doctrine, had developed into a public figure or, in more pedagogical terms, an edifier of the people. The stinging reference to the "Dutch" catechism on the title page of the *Proeve* set the tone for a diatribe in which Coornhert's sharpness and unambiguousness never lose momentum.

---

[79] Ibidem, [26].

[80] D. V. Coornhert, *Proeve vande Nederlantsche catechismo, omme te verstaen of die voort gecomen is wte Godlijcke schrift, dan wt het menschelijcke vernuft* ([Haarlem], 1582).

[81] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 6.

The weight of the *Proeve* was due to the status of the Heidelberg Catechism, that had come to take a prominent position in Reformed ecclesial life. There was good reason for Coornhert to describe it as the "Dutch" catechism. The provincial synod of Dordrecht in 1574 had prescribed that every minister should subscribe to the Catechism before being installed in a living. [82] In 1578 the national synod of Dordrecht renewed this provision. The Heidelberg Catechism (or an approved abridgement of it) was the only text permitted for use when instructing the congregation.[83]

One indicator of the popularity of the Catechism in the late sixteenth century is the number of editions. By 1585 there had already been at least 62 editions in the Low Countries. [84] The standard Dutch text was the translation by Petrus Datheen, dating from 1566, appended to his famous metrical psalms. [85] Like the *Confessio Belgica*, the Catechism was a text that linked the Dutch Reformed to their troubled early years in exile and 'under the cross'. In the years after 1572 both the *Confessio* and the Catechism continued to offer certainties to a church adapting to a new role, and they were often mentioned in one breath as the documents "comprising the sum of the true and pure doctrine of our church."[86]

Given the call for a *corpus doctrinae* at the national synod of Middelburg in 1581, it might be possible to overstate the usefulness of the *Confessio* and the Catechism as anchor points in the doctrinal struggle.[87] The Reformed ministers had to be careful not to base their theological positions on 'secondary' sources. The universal claims of Reformed doctrine required that they be based on more widely accepted authority. The ministers protested perhaps too much that the Bible was their "only rule". They sought to make plain that the *Confessio* and the Catechism "are in conformity [. . .] not with the understanding

---

[82] Van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen*, 4.

[83] W. van 't Spijker, ed., "Acta Synode van Dordrecht 1578", in *De nationale synode van Dordrecht 1578*, ed. D. Nauta and J. P. van Dooren (Amsterdam, 1978), 153–154.

[84] W. Heyting, *De Catechismi en confessies in de Nederlandse reformatie tot 1585* (Nieuwkoop, 1989), 83.

[85] Coornhert used the 1569 edition of the Catechism, printed as an appendix to Datheen's metrical psalms. Coornhert, *Vande erf-sonde*, 553r.

[86] *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts*, [25].

[87] W. van 't Spijker, "Acta van de synode van Middelburg (1581)," in *De nationale synode te Middelburg in 1581: Calvinisme in opbouw in de noordelijke en zuidelijke Nederlanden*, ed. J. P. van Dooren (Middelburg, 1981), 105.

of a Synod, but of Sacred Scripture." [88] In the years of their polemics with Coornhert the ministers had not once referred to the *Confessio*. The Catechism only came into play in 1579, when Coornhert lauched his attack on it. In the defence of Reformed doctrine from outside attack, there was virtually no role for in-house documents such as the *Confessio* and the Catechism.

From the very beginning, confessional and didactic writings such as the *Confessio* and the Catechism were primarily intended for a pastoral purpose in Reformed circles. They were "in all men's hands" and conveyed the central points of the Christian faith to the individual believer.[89] To give the *Confessio* the greatest reach possible, subscription to this document was from 1581 required of all ministers, professors, elders, deacons and schoolmasters. [90] All of them had the duty of teaching and exhorting the faithful to put their trust in God. The *Confessio* expressed this trust in a clear and comprehensive manner, filling an important pastoral need. The obligation to subscribe to the *Confessio* also entailed a certain uniformity in Reformed doctrine. It would, however, be wrong to see the Reformed struggle for "holy uniformity", as it related to church order, as necessarily applicable to doctrine.[91]

Nor did the Catechism offer a dogmatically binding straightjacket. It contributed to the pastoral and liturgical uniformity of countless Reformed congregations, but it gave little occasion for doctrinal precision in Reformed ranks. The opposite was rather the case. As long as a dissident minister was still willing to set his name to the Catechism, the synod was generally willing to wink at his deviant doctrinal opinions. In 1582 Herberts, [92] minister in Gouda, rejected the authority of the Catechism. Doctrinal documents played almost no role in his

---

[88] *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts*, [25]: "met het verstandt niet van eenen Synodo, maer der H. Schrift […] geconformeert zijn."

[89] Ibidem.

[90] *Acta van de Nederlandsche synoden der zestiende eeuw*, ed. F. L. Rutgers (The Hague, 1899; facsimile reprint Dordrecht, 1980), 324. The obligation to subscribe to the *Confessio* was decreed by the Synod of Middelburg in 1581.

[91] Compare Benjamin J. Kaplan, "Dutch Particularism and the Calvinist Quest for 'holy uniformity'," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 82 (1991) 249–250. Kaplan sees the struggle for doctrinal conformity as an extension of the struggle for a uniform church order: "Classes and synods used ecclesiastic discipline to insure that Calvinists throughout the Netherlands shared identical beliefs and worshipped uniformly" (250).

[92] *Lexicon* III, 178–181; *BWPG* III, 700–715.

preaching. He openly proclaimed human perfectibility during life on earth, which he saw as irreconcilable with the Catechism's message. The conflict between Herberts and representatives of various classical and synodal assemblies dragged on for years. Saravia finally mediated a reconciliation in 1586, getting Herberts to confess his error and subscribe to the Catechism.[93]

An attack on the Catechism meant an attack on a document cherished by the Reformed. Made up of 129 simple questions and answers (divided over 52 weeks), the aim of the Catechism was to give the believer a step-by-step guide to eternal salvation. Any public attack on the Catechism would have caused some unease, but the commotion caused by Coornhert's *Proeve* was remarkable. This has to be ascribed to Coornhert's rhetorical gifts. In accessible prose and with the power of his conviction he knocked the biblical foundations out from under the Catechism. He fought the Catechism on its own ground by taking the search for salvation as his point of departure in unmasking this teaching instrument as a product of "human wit". Coornhert's refutation was carefully built up, as though in a pastiche of the Catechism itself. He reduced the document's universal claims to sectarian aspirations.

In producing the *Proeve*, Coornhert had taken the step of writing an explicitly anti-Reformed work aimed at a broad readership. Set beside this work, his earlier polemics against the Catechism paled into dry theological theses. The *Proeve* made appeals to common sense, and the "common man" seems to have been eager to find out what the booklet had to say. On the title page Coornhert had meaningfully quoted Deuteronomy chapter 11, verses 18 and 19: "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as a frontlet between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them, when thou sittest in thine house."[94] In the summer of 1583 it was said that "Coornhert's booklet is being sold and read everywhere."[95] The *Proeve* had found its audience.

The *Proeve* was not only Coornhert's attempt to settle the struggle for the opinion of ordinary believers in his favour; it also had the more

[93] Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 72–74.
[94] Coornhert, *Proeve*, title page.
[95] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 2.

immediate goal of informing the States of his criticism of the Reformed Church and its doctrines. He asked for a "hearing" in the assembly of the States, where he would explain his attack on the Catechism in the presence of Reformed ministers.[96] Coornhert was expressly not calling for a religious disputation, and later explained that he had wanted a "hearing" of both parties during a regular meeting of the States.[97] He would have nothing more to do with partisan commissioners, "whose report is little to be trusted."[98]

Coornhert considered it a question of public interest that decisions in religious matters not be taken "without hearing of parties and without true knowledge of the matter at hand."[99] In the *Proeve* Coornhert addressed this injunction directly to the States. In Coornhert's view they bore a heavy responsibility. "For it is not so long ago, that the unwise zeal of the government, thought to serve God by killing the children of Christ."[100] This suggestion of fallibility, shamelessly expressed to the States, was risky and could easily be read as a lack of respect for their authority. Coornhert was careful to package the remark. The history of the church had seen many periods of error, he wrote, "for man is no all-knowing God."[101] To identify such errors was, according to Coornhert, no more than a service of friendship to the church and its members.

These generalities could not disguise the hostile tenor of Coornhert's warning. He also took refuge in the words of the French writer Philippe Duplessis-Mornay (1549–1623). This champion of French Protestantism had in general terms compared "the reprover of the faults of the churches" to somebody who rang the tocsin when a fire broke out in town or when enemy troops appeared at the gates, only to find the authorities raining down threats and ill-treatment instead

---

[96] Coornhert's formulation in the preface to the *Proeve* is not unambiguous, but seems to assume that the ministers would be present at any such "hearing": "Being ready, should this my short work not satisfy, if your noblenesses' will defer judgement and lend me your ears [. ..] to explain myself at greater length against the proponents of this Catechism." Coornhert, *Proeve*, 7.

[97] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 19 February 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 13.

[98] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 7.

[99] Ibidem.

[100] Ibidem, 7–8: "Want het noch niet lange gheleden en is, dat die onwijse yver des overheyts, Gode gemeynt heeft een dienst te doen int doden vanden jongeren Christi."

[101] Ibidem, 4.

of gratitude. Authorities of this nature, was the conclusion, consisted of "folk who have secret agreement with the enemy." [102] Coornhert felt he had the same message to convey as Duplessis-Mornay. He did not openly accuse the States of high treason, but such an accusation was implicit in the *Proeve*. All the more because Coornhert expressly identified freedom of conscience as "one of the most desirable fruits acquired by us through the harmful and bloody war in the Netherlands." The heritage of the Revolt was in danger of being given away, and Coornhert thought, with all urgency, that he should act now "or else nevermore". [103]

From a theological perspective, Coornhert wrote in the *Proeve* against the doctrines of original sin and forensic justification. There was, however, no systematic exposition of these concepts. Original sin is only mentioned once in the book, while the doctrine of forensic justification is discussed only briefly. Throughout the *Proeve* there is a flurry of concepts related to "human righteousness", such as grace imputed in Christ and the "renewal in all who believe in Christ", but nowhere do they provide the foundations for Coornhert's case. [104] Coornhert's aim was not to guide his readers through the many intricacies of the complex debate about justification. His "only" goal was to convince them that the Catechism was unscriptural.

With regard to the Catechism as a composition of 129 questions and answers, Coornhert's argument in the *Proeve* was remarkably reductionist. The fourth and fifth questions functioned as the main focus in a text that drew its strength from simplicity and repetition. According to Coornhert the Catechism could not be reconciled to the teachings of the Bible. The Bible demanded obedience to God of each believer, while the Catechism clung to human sinfulness unto death. Coornhert indicated this difference as a fundamental opposition, which he then developed in detail and with a bewildering array of demonstrations. He drew the reader into an argument that was a closed system, revolving on its own axis. Every argument led to the same conclusion: contrary to the Catechism, it was humanly possible to keep God's commandments.

---

[102] Ibidem.
[103] Ibidem, 6.
[104] Ibidem, 42.

Reading the *Proeve* does raise the question of the relationship between Coornhert's perfectism and his theological thought. [105] Becker considered Coornhert an "apostle of perfectibility".[106] His theology was one in which perfectism was "the axis around which all else turns." [107] Van Veen posits that Coornhert's perfectism "influenced the Dutch religious landscape profoundly".[108] Perfectism presumes the possibility of human perfection during life on earth. For Coornhert, however, this potential perfection was subordinate to the *process* of spiritual rebirth, in which the human being—always by the grace of Christ—put behind evil and acquired the good. In *Vande wedergheboorte* (1581) Coornhert described the first five stages of this spiritual renewal, up to the stage of "manhood". He did not give a description of the final stage of attained perfection, that of the "father" or "elder", "leaving it to others, who are and see further."[109] Perfection was not necessary to salvation. Children who died "imperfect" were in this regard the equals of "those full-grown men who have reached full maturity in Christ." [110] Perfection was a goal to be aimed for, the prize that would motivate a human person to fight against evil.[111]

Coornhert primarily deployed perfectism as a powerful rhetorical weapon in his fight against Reformed doctrine, as the *Proeve* shows. The reverse was also true: the term 'perfectist' was used by Coornhert's opponents as a derogatory term not only for those who, in a Pelagian fashion, denied divine omnipotence by ascribing to humanity an active role in the process of salvation, but for anyone who held that humans were perfectible. It is questionable whether terms such as 'perfectist' and 'Pelagian' are really useful to a historian, or should simply be abandoned. As in the Hortensius affair, there is in Coornhert's case a deeper

---

[105] The secondary literature emphasizes the quirkiness of Coornhert's theological views, e.g. "to 'define' Coornhert is practically impossible." Berkvens-Stevelinck, "Coornhert, een eigenzinnig theoloog," 18. E. Dekker disputes the originality of Coornhert's theological thought with regard to his "doctrine of willing and permitting." E. Dekker, "Wilsvrijheid volgens Coornhert in het traditie-historische licht van de scholastiek: Een kleine dieptepeiling," *NTT* 45 (1991), 119.

[106] B. Becker, "Coornhert, de 16de eeuwsche apostel der volmaakbaarheid," *NAKG* 19 (1926) 59–84.

[107] Becker, "Coornhert, de 16de eeuwsche apostel der volmaakbaarheid", 78.

[108] Mirjam G.K. van Veen, "'No one born of God commits sin': Coornhert's perfectionism", *NAKG* 84 (2004), 338–357.

[109] Coornhert, *Vande wedergheboorte*, 184v.

[110] D. V. Coornhert, *Vande ware onderdanicheyt der christen, schriftuerlijcke bewysinghe uit die wille Godes* ([Haarlem], 1581) 1v; Idem, *Proeve*, 11.

[111] Coornhert, *Vande ware onderdanicheyt*, 2r.

disagreement about the doctrine of justification. Coornhert confirmed this in his 1582 treatise *Tafel vander ghelovigen justificatie* ("Table of the justification of believers").[112] In this he showed himself not a 'perfectist' but an advocate of infused grace (*iustitia inhaerens*).[113]

It is tempting to relate Coornhert's thought to semi-Pelagianism, in which the human person—by an act of will—turns towards God, opening up to divine grace and co-operating in sanctification.[114] But despite such synergism Coornhert abhorred any suggestion of human merit in the process of justification.[115] Coornhert strikingly compares the sinful person to a beggar holding out his hands to receive alms. The beggar might have made an act of will—after all, he could always refuse the gift—but that does not mean that he has earned the alms given.[116] Although Coornhert made salvation dependent on human co-operation, he stated baldly that in this process of justification only the "pure grace" of God could be decisive.[117] It is difficult to gauge the extent to which such a position deserves the label 'semi-Pelagian'—not least because the precise meaning of terms such as (semi-)Pelagianism changed from one debate to the next.

In this early stage of research into Coornhert's soteriology it seems to me to be premature to take Coornhert's perfectism as the foundation of his theology. Although this study can only offer suggestions, it seems that the heart of Coornhert's doctrine of grace lies rather in his view of the relationship between human justification and human sanctification. The degree to which his theological views on such matters were unusual still has to be demonstrated.

Coornhert announced on the first page of the *Proeve* what was at stake in his booklet: Christian life in the broadest sense of the term.

---

[112] D. V. Coornhert, *Tafel vander ghelovigen justificatie ofte rechtvaerdichwordinge in Christo Jesu* (Haarlem, 1582).

[113] Coornhert, *Tafel vander ghelovigen justificatie*, 3v.

[114] Coornhert, *Van de erfzonde*, 6: "But if God were again to appear so a hundred times over, it would avail nothing if people kept the eyes of their understanding closed." Leszek Kolakowski ascribes semi-Pelagianism to the conviction that "We are capable […] of spurning divine aid or accepting it by a free act of assent." Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago, 1995), 109.

[115] Coornhert, *Van de erfzonde*, 6: "The person can of themselves think no good, much less desire, will or do it."

[116] Coornhert, *Vande wedergheboorte*, 180v.

[117] Ibidem.

A literal repetition of the fourth and fifth question of the Catechism gave Coornhert matter enough to develop the fundamental disagreement between the Bible and the Catechism. The fourth question of the Catechism—"What does the law of God require of us?"—is answered with a reference to Matthew 22: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." [118] This is followed by the answer to the fifth question—"Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?"—with a plain denial: "In no wise, for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbour." [119]

The Catechism's answer to the fifth question was, in Coornhert's view, incompatible with scripture on four counts. Not only did scripture teach that the human person was fully capable of keeping God's commandments, the answer to the fifth question made no sense in light of the effects of Christ's salvific death on the inner man. Coornhert developed this theme in the second and third parts of his *Proeve*, in which deliverance in Christ trumps the sin of Adam. The last part of the treatise dealt with prayer. If a person was to be fully convinced of their own depravity, as the Catechism taught, then they could never pray to God for deliverance from sin with any security. This "praying doubtfully" was, as Coornhert sought to show, "an insult to God". [120]

In 57 separate passages, sometimes subdivided into smaller units, Coornhert with innumerable quotations again and again came to the conclusion that the fifth question of the Catechism was contrary to scripture. The Catechism's powerful 'No' sounds through every page of the *Proeve* as a 'No' to the true teachings of Christianity. It is this continual repetition that gives the *Proeve* its rhetorical force.

Coornhert's striving for maximum rhetorical effect can be seen in his many citations of Calvin. When Coornhert, by his own account, first set eyes on the Catechism in 1578, "I saw directly the said teachings built on the foundation of the aforesaid original sin as taught by Calvin."[121] In the *Proeve* Coornhert used countless quotations from Calvin's work to *attack* the Catechism and the doctrine of depravity

[118] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 9.
[119] Ibidem.
[120] Ibidem, 73–74.
[121] Coornhert, *Vande erf-sonde*, 552v.

that it taught. Coornhert achieved his aim through selective quotation from Calvin's works, ripping the words out of their broader theological context. This left the defenders of the Catechism out on a limb: they could not even take recourse to Calvin.

The manner in which Coornhert helped himself to quotations from the works of writers such as Calvin and Beza infuriated the ministers. They regretted Coornhert's decision not to limit his authorities to scripture. In their view he could only deploy the arguments of Calvin and Beza in support of his own points by twisting them. Coornhert must therefore be guilty either of misunderstanding or of deliberately misrepresenting the works he cited. This involved the ministers "in an endless process" and made it difficult to argue with Coornhert in any reasonable way.[122] At the same time, Coornhert undermined the ministers' claims to truthfulness by displaying supposed contradictions in their teachings. Coornhert showed that Calvin's arguments were contrary to Reformed doctrine as proclaimed by the ministers, and even by Calvin himself. The ministers admitted that Coornhert made them look like "unreliable witnesses", which only confirms the effectiveness of his pamphlet.[123]

Although Coornhert's use of Calvin generally comes across as quite forced, this aspect of the demonstration in the *Proeve* cannot be seen entirely as deliberate misrepresentation. In one of the subsections of the *Proeve* Coornhert showed that Calvin's thinking about the human will to the good is based on Augustine and can be brought into agreement with scripture.[124] Coornhert was of the opinion that the Protestant Reformers had done some good work in combating doctrinal errors going back centuries. In 1579 he wrote: "For as not all is true that the church fathers have taught, not all is false that the innovators write against them."[125]

In the preface to the *Proeve* Coornhert recalled that the ministers of Delft had once (in the person of Tilius) themselves acknowledged that Luther and Zwingli had done good with their criticism of the Mother Church. Every "Christian person" was obliged to do the same.

---

[122] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 7.

[123] Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (minute), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636, fo. 2.

[124] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 23.

[125] Coornhert, *Vande erf-sonde*, 553r: "Want het is niet al waerheyt wat die patres hebben gheleert, soo en is oock niet al loghen wat die nieuwelinghen daer teghen schrijven."

Coornhert's forthright criticism of the Reformed Church has to be seen in the light of this general obligation. A comparison between the "old" and the "young", that is to say the spokesmen of the early Church and the theologians of more recent times, showed that a critical attitude towards the Church and its teaching was always desirable. Just as the "old" had deviated from the straight and narrow, Coornhert saw the "young" as equally capable of going astray. [126]

The *Proeve* was, however, more than an abstract exercise in criticism. Coornhert was convinced of the urgent necessity of the pamphlet, accompanying it with warnings against Reformed "tyranny". In the preface Coornhert pointed his readers to two signs of the times. Firstly, the Heidelberg Catechism was poisoning the minds of the young, now that the ministers had obtained a government measure obliging the teachers at Latin schools to teach Christianity solely from the Catechism.[127] Secondly, the ministers were now confident enough of their own power to express an open aversion to religious freedom. Coornhert cited a treatise that the ministers had dedicated to the States in 1582, in which they stated their dissatisfaction with "the freedom, that each should be allowed to believe as they please." [128] Coornhert used this remark—itself a tendentious paraphrase of the words the ministers had used—to suggest unfairly that his opponents sought to limit not only freedom of religion, but even freedom of conscience. The ministers, however, had only questioned the liberty to give *public* expression to certain religious convictions. [129]

In his argument Coornhert clung to the idea that only "free and truthful admonishment" could save mankind from continually falling into error. In free debate, after all, truth would triumph. The 1581 book edict had limited this very freedom, to the extent that criticism of the Reformed Church could no longer be set down on paper without the prior consent of the States. This meant that the States were publicly taking the side of Reformed doctrine. Coornhert's *Proeve* was an immediate challenge to put deeds behind their words.

---

[126] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 5.

[127] Ibidem, 6; *Remonstrantie*, 11. The ministers refer to a "draft proclamation for the sole use of the Dutch Catechism in common schools," suggesting that it was a decree of the States.

[128] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 6: "die vrijheyt, dat elck soude moghen gheloven dat hem belieft."

[129] *Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts* , [30].

Resolution, Remonstrance and Request

On 11 February 1583 the States decreed that the book edict of 1581 applied to the *Proeve* and instituted an official enquiry into Coornhert's publications.[130] This resolution was passed after Van der Laan had spoken in its favour. It is difficult to tell whether this means he was turning his back on his friend Coornhert, or was trying to protect him. After all, as long as the *Proeve* had not been widely disseminated, it might be possible to forestall charges being brought against Coornhert. In any case the *Proeve* meant the end of Van der Laan's well-intended attempts to solve the Coornhert affair through dialogue.

Having been asked to read it before it was put on sale, Van der Laan was the first to become aware of the contents of the treatise. Not that Coornhert intended to make any changes, whatever his friend might say: he only sent Van der Laan a copy after the *Proeve* had been printed.[131] Nevertheless, this Haarlem regent did not fail to make his disapproval plain to Coornhert. [132] In January 1583 he made a final attempt to bring the parties together for exploratory talks. Coornhert quickly put everybody on edge by suggesting a *status quaestionis* that would have put his counterpart, probably the Haarlem minister Damius, on the defensive from the start. [133] Van der Laan reacted with displeasure and the discussions stalled.[134] He could no longer see a

---

[130] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 11 February 1583. The States prohibited further dissemination of the *Proeve* and determined that all copies of the work, as well as all of Coornhert's earlier works "dealing with matters of religion," were to be handed in to the magistrates of Haarlem. The same magistrates were ordered "to proceed in accordance with the edict" against both Coornhert and the printer. This amounted to an order that criminal fines be levied on both Coornhert and the printer, to the amount of "a hundred Carolus guilders for the first offence."

[131] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 19 February 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 12. Coornhert made no changes in response to Van der Laan's criticisms, but did go to the trouble of correcting a deliberate "mistake" in his presentation of the text of the Catechism by pasting in the correct reading. See p. 232.

[132] "He, vander Laan, having read it came to Haarlem, I ask how it pleases him, he said ill-temperedly: I ask after proof or reason, but could get none out of it." Ibidem, 13.

[133] Coornhert was looking forward to a meeting at Van der Laan's house "in the presence of Minister Damius and three or four impartial men." The exchange of ideas concerning the *status quaestionis* took place in writing beforehand and remains very unclear. Coornhert states that he did not know "whose understanding" had produced the series of questions, nor is it clear whether this polemic was in addition to the meeting already mentioned, or replaced it. Ibidem.

[134] Ibidem, 13–14.

reason for exploratory talks, or even an informal debate. It was high time that the States took a hand in the case.

"It were best that order were given that you and the ministers be heard in person by the Lords of the States in session", Van der Laan was to say to Coornhert in the course of January 1583. [135] Coornhert saw in this comment a reflection of his own request to the States, as formulated in the *Proeve*. Yet it would be wrong to see the October 1583 disputation in The Hague as in any way following naturally from the publication of the *Proeve*. Until a few weeks before it began an official formal debate was far from the mind of any of the participants. In February 1583 Coornhert was at most playing with the idea of giving his own "account" to the States, in the presence of the ministers; [136] Van der Laan was thinking rather of a "hearing" to settle the Coornhert affair once and for all. It is clear that—after a series of prohibitions aimed directly at him!—Coornhert's opinion would carry no weight with the States as they reached a decision on what to do. Van der Laan consulted Cornelisz and Donteclock, who soon saw their 'memorial' to the deputy transformed into the resolution that was passed by the States on 11 February 1583.

The prior history to the disputation in The Hague is the story of the close but complex alliance between the public church and the States. That the States supported the Reformed Church was beyond question; less self-evident was the manner in which this support was openly shown. Too pronounced a pro-Reformed policy, which in this case would mean dealing with Coornhert firmly, would alienate large sections of the population. In the ministers' view, however, Coornhert's *Proeve* forced a rethink. This pamphlet, an open and widely accessible declaration of contempt for the Reformed Church and of correction to the States, must necessarily provoke a reaction. It was not hard to convince the States of this in principle, but practice was more recalcitrant. After passing the resolution of 11 February 1583 the States adopted a waiting posture. In the mean time the ministers Cornelisz and Donteclock were furiously seeking the right arguments to get the States to take action.

---

[135] Ibidem, 13.

[136] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 7. Coornhert applied the principle of *audi alteram partem*.

From the very beginning the ministers took differing views of how to deal with the Coornhert affair. Van der Corput took the view that the church should manage the affair itself. He advised Cornelisz that the ministers themselves should keep a desirable settlement in reserve. Van der Corput was thinking along the lines of a condemnation of Coornhert's writings by the synod, assisted by professors. In a synodal context matters could be expedited more effectively. Cornelisz's plan involved an examination of the contents of the *Proeve* by professors. Van der Corput thought the more academic approach could easily give rise to delay, and there was no guarantee that the States would support the outcome. Despite these misgivings, Van der Corput agreed to Cornelisz's plan. He did so on the express condition that the synod would take up the defence of doctrine should Coornhert resist the measures taken by the States. The prosecution of Coornhert was in any case an issue for the States. [137]

It is notable that as late as 22 February 1583 Van der Corput was still unaware of the resolution that the States had recently taken against Coornhert. "It amazes me that the States do nothing, when in their name the religion is attacked through the catechism that they nevertheless swore to maintain", he commented with bitterness. In other words: Van der Laan, active in the question of religion, was an exception among the deputies to the States. Which is not to say that "the cause of religion" left the States cold. On the contrary, the records of a session of the States in January 1582 indicate that a whole afternoon was devoted to the question of religion, namely "in what order the same can be Christianly advanced, and all unity maintained therein."[138] A year later, it was this very consideration that prevented the States from finding an easy solution to the Coornhert affair.

In his advice to Van der Laan, dated 10 February 1583, Cornelisz gave no opinion as to exactly what government action against Coornhert he thought most advisable. He expected the States to "continue in such fashion as will be found most fitting for the investigation and maintenance of the truth."[139] It must have taken Cornelisz by surprise that

---

[137] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 22 February 1583, in *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 241–242.

[138] NA, StvH, inv. no. 17, Res. 19 January 1582.

[139] Memorial of Cornelisz to Van der Laan (minute), 10 February 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

the very next day the States, with no further ado, decreed the edict of 1581 to be applicable to the *Proeve*. Given his collaboration with Van der Laan, Cornelisz—unlike, for instance, Van der Corput—must have been entirely abreast of the measures taken by the States. Outside the small circle of those directly involved, however, little was done to publicize the resolution. Even Coornhert was only told that there would be an "enquiry" into his work, and that professors from Leiden would be involved. Van der Laan did not discuss any of the punitive measures set out in the resolution. It was only through rumours that Coornhert picked up that "the same Lords of the States are said to be intending to proceed against him as though he had in printing the same or other of his booklets infringed against the edict." He also came to hear that the States had ordered the magistrates of Haarlem to call in all printed copies of the *Proeve* and deliver them to the States. A petition that Coornhert addressed to Haarlem city council in the months prior to the disputation in The Hague makes it clear that he felt his liberty seriously compromised by the policy of the States. [140]

In the end, none of the measures proposed were put into effect. This was not a question of laxity or powerlessness on the part of the States. On the contrary, the States deliberately opted for a phased execution of the punitive resolution. The two parts of the resolution, the application of the edict and the academic investigation of Coornhert's writings, could not be carried out independently of one another. The written enquiry had to precede (and legitimize) the punishment.

The resolution adopted by the States stuck almost word for word to the memorial that Cornelisz had drawn up for Van der Laan. Cornelisz had far fewer reservations about the States than did his fellow minister Van der Corput; through his advice to Van der Laan, he had managed to make the Coornhert affair an explicit affair of state. The minister wanted an enquiry carried out by professors but sanctioned by the States. Coornhert's theological positions would be examined on the basis of a series of theses derived from the *Proeve*; his argumentation—which was to be brief and based only on the Bible—would then be expertly rebutted in writing by the professors. In the process they would prove that the Catechism accorded with scripture. The States

[140] Coornhert's petition to Haarlem city council, [spring/summer 1583], in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 109–111, esp. 110. By means of this petition Coornhert hoped to get the magistrates of Haarlem to get the States to explain their intention regarding the application of the 1581 book edict to his *Proeve*.

decreed that besides the *Proeve* other works by Coornhert were also to be submitted to this procedure. The resolution ended by saying that Coornhert would (possibly *in persona*) be questioned more broadly about his relationship to the Reformed Church, so that he could be silenced once and for all. [141]

It was at all times to be kept clear that it was to the States, not to a group of academics, that Coornhert had to give account for his writings. The States would always take the lead in this written procedure "so that the States having understood the true grounds of difference, can then make further provision therein, as will be thought fitting to defence of the truth and divine doctrine and Holy Writ." [142]

The condemnation of Coornhert's theology had been decided on in advance. The edict of 1581 was to be applied to the *Proeve* due to the "great unrest in the country" that might be occasioned by the further circulation of such a book "in these perilous times". It was at the same time the intention of the States to take away "all further errors of the aforesaid Dirk Coornhert." The Coornhert affair here provides an excellent illustration of how the government appealed to the wartime situation through the 1581 edict, the motivation for which was primarily political. This way of proceeding, however, brought an important religious, if not theological, component into play. Political unity presupposed religious unity, which was itself based on theological positions. The policy of the States was a plainly pro-Reformed religious policy, even in doctrinal issues. The States set down black on white that the investigation of Coornhert's views was to be entrusted to professors so that "they affirm the conformity of the teaching of the Catechism to sacred scripture, and refute Coornhert's writings." [143]

The Leiden professors gave the investigation of the *Proeve* a hint of impartiality. In Leiden there were at that time two professors of theology active, to wit Johannes Holmannus (1523–1586) and Hubertus Sturmius, the latter appointed as extraordinary professor from 1580 to 1584. Since the controversial professorship of Danaeus (1581–1582), the university authorities had been discouraging too close a tie to the

---

[141] The States wanted to get Coornhert to express "a clear confession [. . .] of his belief," "the better to note where he differs or agrees with the doctrine of the Reformed Church." NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 11 February 1583.

[142] Ibidem.

[143] Ibidem.

Reformed Church.[144] Danaeus, who besides being professor had also been minister to the Walloon church in Leiden, was closely involved in clerical affairs, as can be seen from his presence at the synod of Middelburg (1581).[145] He argued for a church order modelled on that of Geneva, which set bad blood with the magistrates of Leiden. When Danaeus supported a student protest against the appointment of a particular minister in February 1582, the city government had had enough. The conflict was furious. Danaeus, speaking of a total loss of confidence, left Leiden.[146]

The new Leiden theology professor, Holmannus, was appointed on 31 July 1582 on condition that "he will involve himself in neither the ecclesiastical nor the civil affairs of this city nor the country in general, but concern himself only with his profession." Should an ecclesiastical or civil conflict break out, he was advised "that he keep out of the same, and without taking one side or the other shall labour to correct errors and level and reconcile disagreements." [147]

Despite the Reformed background of the Leiden professors, they cannot be regarded as spokesmen for the Reformed clergy. The University of Leiden was in the first place subject to the States.[148] Pettegree even points to an outspoken hostility towards the university among some clergymen.[149] This might explain the addition of a leading minister, Donteclock, to the 'committee of visitation' charged with investigating Coornhert's writings. But others were convinced of the loyalty of the Leiden professors to the Reformed cause. That the neutrality of these theologians was indeed disputed, comes to the fore in the account given by Pieter Bor. According to him, Coornhert had opposed the plans of the States due to the involvement of the university, which he regarded as biased.[150] Bor too, however, admitted that there was a lot more going on. A "debate" on the basis of theses, as envisaged by the

---

[144] Clotz, *Hochschüle für Holland*, 172–173.
[145] Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 36–41.
[146] Ibidem, 83–89.
[147] *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche universiteit*, vol. 1, *1574–7 februari 1610*, ed. P. C. Molhuysen, RGP, grote ser., no. 20 (The Hague, 1913) 34.
[148] For Van der Corput it was, for instance, not self-evident that the professors would carry out an examination of Coornhert's opinions "without order from the States and transmitting their censure to the States." Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 22 February 1583, *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 241.
[149] Pettegree, "Coming to Terms with Victory", 167.
[150] Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 18, 35v.

States, Coornhert regarded as "an escape route". [151] In a short letter to Van der Laan, Coornhert aimed his criticism at precisely this point. "The part assigned to me or to be assigned to me I am pleased to accept, but not the condition that they should first search out propositions."[152]

This criticism touched a tender spot. Even more than the involvement of professors, the formal structure of the investigation was intended to give the proceedings an appearance of impartiality. On Cornelisz's advice the States had given order that a series of theses be arrived at by testing the *Proeve* against sacred scripture. These theses would then encapsulate the precise nature and extent of the differences between the ministers and Coornhert. Although the professors were to take the Bible as a guideline for their investigation, the composition of the theses still gave them some room to manoeuvre. [153] The professors could draft propositions that evaded Coornhert's central points, or that presented his theology in an unfavourable light.

Coornhert wanted the hearing to be an explicit discussion of the Catechism. In his *Proeve* he had already, he wrote to Van der Laan, distilled two "propositions" from this doctrinal primer. It was down to the ministers to respond to these theses concerning the impossibility of fully obeying God's commandments and the depravity of human nature. "Each ought to prove his saying", said Coornhert. [154] Coornhert nonetheless informed Van der Laan that he would not resist the plans of the States. "Nevertheless, whatever is thought fitting herein, to wit of the mode of conferring, I will be found ready and willing to agree to when informed of it, as it gladdens my heart to see that the Lord States now hold to the right way therein, to support doctrine by truth and not by force." [155]

The intended investigation never got off the ground. Prior to the Leiden disputation, when the involvement of Leiden University had

---

[151] Ibidem.

[152] Coornhert to Van der Laan, 14 February 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 15.

[153] The resolution of the States mentioned that the *Proeve* would be examined to determine in how far it was contrary "to the meaning and intent of Sacred Scripture and God's Word." Coornhert would then be called upon to defend himself "out of Scripture", and finally the professors would then confirm the doctrine of the Catechism "with Sacred Scripture." NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 11 February 1583.

[154] Coornhert to Van der Laan, 14 February 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 15.

[155] Ibidem: "Nyet te min, wat hier af, te weten de modo conferendi behoorlijck sal bevonden worden, salmen my, daarop volhoort zijnde, bereydt ende willigh toe vinden, die met herten gaarne sie, dat de H. H. Staten den rechten wegh nu houden, daar inne, datmen de leere met waarheydt ende nyet met macht voor wil staan."

also been sought, matters had gone no further than consultation with the university's governors.[156] In the run-up to the debate in The Hague the intention evaporated at an even earlier stage. In the sources there are no signs of any consultation between the States and the university concerning an examination of Coornhert's writings. There is no obvious reason for this failure to carry through. The best explanation that can be offered is that Coornhert's critical attitude perhaps delayed matters. Van der Corput had already hinted that problems would arise if Coornhert were given time to consider his position. He feared that Coornhert would give "slippery" answers to the theses presented by the States, with his books selling better by the day.[157] There is, however, every appearance that the delay began even before Coornhert had framed a response. Either way, the effect was the same. The *Proeve*—that in the summer of 1583 was being "sold and distributed everywhere"—was proving a tremendous success.[158] In a seeming paradox, this kept the States from intervening too strenuously to suppress the work. High-profile government action against Coornhert would only increase sales. Practical considerations prevailed, so that Coornhert for the present was left undisturbed. The resolution by which the States had ordered an investigation of Coornhert's writing was, however, not in any way rescinded.

In the course of March 1583 it must have become clear to the ministers, to Cornelisz and Donteclock in particular, that there was a danger of the resolution of the States remaining a dead letter. That a religious disputation with Coornhert took place in the autumn of 1583 is due solely to the efforts of the Delft pastors. They persisted in their aim of making the Coornhert affair a matter for the States. They prodded the government with a remonstrance (March 1583) and a petition (August 1583).[159] The two pieces had rather different aims. The remonstrance

---

[156] See pp. 118–120.

[157] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 22 February 1583, *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 241.

[158] Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (copy), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[159] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie aen mijn Heeren de Staten slandts van Hollandt. Ghepresenteerd by eenighe dienaren der ghereformeerde kercke tot Delff. In de welcke gheantwoort wordt op eenen brief van Dirck Cornhert aen de voorsz Staten, ghedruct voor een boecxken, ghenaemt, Proeve des Nederlandtschen Catechismi* (Delft 1583); Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (copy), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

was a next step in the seemingly endless Coornhert affair. With this extensive complaint against Coornhert the ministers hoped to goad the States into implementing the resolution of February 1583. The petition was concerned with the relationship between church and state. The call for the States to intervene in the Coornhert affair had developed into a plea for open and unconditional support of the Reformed Church.

In the remonstrance to the States in March 1583 Cornelisz and Donteclock defended themselves against the allegations made in the preface of Coornhert's *Proeve*. Now that this pamphlet had been widely disseminated, they thought it necessary to set out their defence in writing. The most important accusation in the venomous prologue to the *Proeve* was that the ministers intended to force their (false) teachings on the people with the support of the States, if necessary in a "bloody tyranny". Coornhert regarded the ministers' refusal to debate with him any further as a sign of imminent religious persecution by the secular authorities.[160] The remonstrance of Cornelisz and Donteclock in the first instance reads as an apologia for the stance they had taken in the conflict with Coornhert.[161] The ministers also made an effort to make out Coornhert as a *political* danger. In their eyes, an enemy of the "common cause" was an enemy of the Reformed religion, and vice versa. By presenting the Reformed Church as a "false sect", Coornhert was giving comfort to the Catholic enemy, whose pressure to re-allow Catholic worship was intended "to create an opening that could be widened".[162]

In their remonstrance, Cornelisz and Donteclock made it clear that it was up to the States to make the next move in the Coornhert affair. Citing a series of biblical texts, including the injunction that "heretics after the first and second admonition are to be shunned", the ministers intimated that Coornhert had been given answers enough.[163] They naturally had no intention of shirking the defence of their doctrine

[160] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 4–6.

[161] The ministers dedicated the first half of the remonstrance, totalling fifteen pages, to answering Coornhert's accusation that they were unable to defend their doctrine, and in the process of doing so raked over the whole history of the conflict with Coornhert back to the first clashes in Haarlem in 1577. Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 1–8.

[162] Ibidem, 9.

[163] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 8. The ministers accused Coornhert of reviving "the ancient heresies of Pelagius and Celestius condemned by Christ's Church out of the Lord's Word." Ibidem, 15.

in future, but in the present situation things had reached a stage that required the intervention of the States. According to the two ministers, the States could bring the Coornhert affair to an end "with some fitting and due measures".[164] This is a transparent allusion to the resolution adopted in February 1583. The exhortation to the States in the peroration of the remonstrance fits the same mould. The States should ensure that the ministers examine Coornhert at the earliest opportunity.[165] The resolution already provided the blueprint for such a hearing.

The ministers' remonstrance was effective to the extent that the States amended the resolution of 10 February 1583. The ministers of Delft were no longer bound to work in formal co-operation with Leiden University. The States adopted an order providing that Adrianus Saravia, rather than Leiden professors, should draw a series of propositions from the *Proeve*, assisted by one of the Delft ministers.[166] In this period Saravia maintained close relations with Leiden University, but he was only to be appointed professor in the course of 1584.[167] We cannot tell whether the professors in Leiden passed the ball to Saravia, or whether the Delft ministers put his name forward. The intended co-operation was in any case not easy, as can be seen from the course of events at the provincial synod in The Hague in June 1583.

In the session of 11 June, Cornelisz and Donteclock declined to discuss the settlement of the Coornhert affair in Saravia's absence, something that already indicates the importance of his involvement.[168] When the point was brought up again two weeks later—in the mean time Saravia had arrived—the Delft ministers indicated the necessity of government intervention. The Coornhert affair was, they said, "a business that tends to great injury to the kingdom of Christ and gives great footing for the sects to spread their errors without awe or fear as though having the protection of the States themselves."[169] Despite the States' new order, however, there had been no movement in the

---

[164] Ibidem.

[165] Ibidem, 14. The request was as follows: "[…] our earnest desire and request, that Your Noblenesses will most directly take order that he and those who will aid him be heard against ours."

[166] *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* II, ed. Reitsma and Van Veen, 256.

[167] Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 63.

[168] *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* II, ed. Reitsma and Van Veen, 229.

[169] Ibidem, 256: "een saecke, die tot grooten aȧreuck des rijx Christi is streckende ende den secten eenen grooten voet gheeft om hare dwalinghen sonder ontsich ende vreese te stroijen als protectie hebbende van den Staten selve."

case. Cornelisz and Donteclock's request to the synod suggests that they differed from Saravia concerning the approach best to be taken. They asked the assembly to exhort Saravia to set about extracting theses from the *Proeve* without delay, "without embarking on a written response against the aforesaid books of Coornhert, which would be an endless task."[170]

Saravia had doubts of his own about a point-by-point refutation of Coornhert's ideas, and wanted to think through a more fundamental approach. The synod, however, gave him no time for this, ordering that he and his assistants from Delft submit a series of theses to the States "at the first opportunity". This was to be accompanied by a petition in which the ministers requested a "colloquy" with Coornhert in the presence of the States. According to the synod it was high time that both parties were heard: Coornhert had to render account for his attack on Reformed doctrine, and the ministers had to be allowed to present their "defence". Should the States fail to accede to this request, the synod was willing to consider bringing a case in the Court of Holland. [171]

In the summer of 1583 a series of theses had still not been drawn up, but the ministers did make some progress towards turning the Coornhert affair into an affair of state. They turned to a broader audience, their main theme being the legitimacy of the Reformed Chuch as public church—thus far a side issue of the Coornhert affair. To counteract the *Proeve*, Cornelisz and Donteclock had their remonstrance printed, in hopes that this would temper the public enthusiasm for Coornhert's ideas.[172] Coornhert's furious reaction to this "infamous libel" leads one to suspect that the manoeuvre was not without effect. Coornhert set eyes on the *Remonstrance* in the first half of October 1583, by which time he was preparing for the disputation in The Hague. His reaction to this "apologia", which he described as full of "accusations as serious as they were false", was fierce.[173]

---

[170] Ibidem.

[171] Ibidem, 256–257. The minutes refer to the "provincial Council of Holland."

[172] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, "Aen den leser". The impress gives only the year of publication (1583); the pamphlet can however be dated more exactly on the basis of the preface, in which the ministers state that Coornhert has since been given to understand that he could be summoned before the States to render account of his writings. This information was conveyed by a letter of 26 August 1583. The date on which the disputation in The Hague was to begin was made known on 2 October of the same year; the latter can be considered the outer range for publication.

[173] Coornhert, *Theriakel*, [3]. The publication of the ministers' remonstrance provoked Coornhert to produce two works: the *Cort betoogh aan mijne E. Hooghachtbare,*

At least as important was the petition that the ministers, together with Adrianus Saravia, addressed to the States in August 1583. Saravia's involvement was felt here. This leading theologian was an important spokesman for the authority of the secular authorities in ecclesiastical affairs. His modern biographer decribes his thinking as theocratic. [174] It is likely that he gave his Delft colleagues the final push not to wait for a reaction to their earlier appeals, but to present the States with carefully weighed arguments for their involvement in the battle around the *Proeve*.

In their remonstrance the ministers had tried to blacken Coornhert, but in their petition it was the States that faced accusation. The government's supine position was harming the public church. It speaks volumes that in their petition to the States the ministers no longer asked that Coornhert be called to account, but launched an appeal to be allowed to present their own "defences". The ministers fully admitted that their backs were against the wall. The 1583 resolution, providing for an academic examination of Coornhert's views and a condemnation of his writings on the basis of the 1581 edict, they regarded as superseded. The ministers presented their request—slightly artificially—as the logical consequence of this resolution, but it must also have been clear to the States that with this petition the ministers were taking a new route. The ministers wanted to present their defense against Coornhert's accusations in the assembly of the States, so that "all the world shall judge that there is no backwardness on our part to answer in full these accusations against the doctrine of our church." [175]

For the legitimacy of the Reformed Church as the public church, the ministers wanted to show that they could maintain their *doctrine* in the face of Coornhert's attacks. It is remarkable that the ministers opted to use only political arguments to convince the States to allow a theological debate. The draft version of the petition still suggested

---

gheleerde ende voorsienighe H.H. commissarisen inde sake der predicanten ende Coornhert and the highly polemical *Theriakel teghen het venijnighe wroegh-schrift by Arent Cornelisz. ende Reynier Donteclock* (Gouda, 1617). The first piece was included in later editions of the *Proeve* as an appendix. See D. V. Coornhert, *Proeve van de Heydelbergsche Catechismo* (Gouda, 1617).

[174] Nijenhuis, *Saravia*, 245.

[175] Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (copy), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636: "dat de gantsche werldt oordeelen sal dat het aen ons niet en ghebreeckt, of de leere onser kercken werdt ten vollen teghen desen beschuldigher verantwoordt."

an extensive theological survey, in which Saravia and his companions would set out Coornhert's perfectist position. This was a question "of very great weight and importance", as it related to the "article of human justification and salvation". In the time of "papistical darkness" experience had taught that if this doctrine were wrongly interpreted, error would infect all other doctrines. [176] In the final version of the petition this passage is absent. The ministers must have decided that the States would be moved to act more rapidly by arguments of a different sort.

In the petition the ministers make a direct connection between the Coornhert affair and the liberties won in the Revolt against the king of Spain. Coornhert's "false accusations and calumnies" threatened to weaken the position of the public church and forfeit the "booty" won by the Revolt. The relationship between the public church and the States was placed front and centre. After all, as early as the memorial to Van der Laan in February 1583 the ministers had warned that the States should reflect upon their most important duty as a "Christian government", namely "the care for true religion". By standing aloof, the authorities were not only harbouring the danger of the "final decay of the church", but also gave occasion to fear "great disorders, riotousness and alterations in the polity". [177] In their remonstrance to the States the ministers had also specified that critics such as Coornhert were a cause of "harmful commotion [. ..] for the commonweal". [178]

In the petition the ministers continued along the same lines, but turned up the pressure on the States considerably. There is even a certain bitterness in the request:

> Your Noblenesses can also imagine for yourselves how many valiant hearts and loyal patriots are saddened and offended to see a doctrine, for which they risked life and goods, and that is sealed by the blood of so many martyrs, charged as a false heresy with nothing being undertaken to prevent it.[179]

---

[176] Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (minute), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[177] Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (copy), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[178] Cornelisz, Donteclock, *Remonstrantie*, 9.

[179] Petition of Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock to the States of Holland (copy), August 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636: "Uwe E. connen oock bij haer selven bedencken, hoe vele vrome herten ende ghetrouwe patrioten hier inne bedroeft ende opt aller hoochste ghearghert zijn, datse een leere, voor dewelcke zij lijf ende goet ghewaecht hebben, die van soo vele martelaeren met haer eijghen bloedt beseghelt is

According to the ministers, the policy of the States was playing into the hands of the fatherland's enemies. Religious divisions were becoming sharper. Many were developing a revulsion from religion as such, and all the difficulties it brought with it. They turned away from religion, not only dooming themselves but also risking divine displeasure with the county as a whole. Holland had since 1572 received such "noteworthy and miraculous benefactions" from God "that the surrounding provinces have rightly been amazed and confused by them." The States, however, showed "great ingratitude" by their readiness to trample down this priceless gift, "his sacred Religion planted in our midst".[180] According to the ministers, the States had failed to take up the cause of religion, returning indifference for good.

In the August 1583 petition, Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock confirmed the desire for a debate with Coornhert, already hinted at in the remonstrance. Whether the ministers intended this to be a public conference is difficult to say. The ministers informed the States that they wished to justify their doctrine "before the full assembly of your Noblenesses, provoked so to do by this accuser" (meaning Coornhert).[181] Almost word for word their request echoed Coornhert's in the preface to the Proeve. Coornhert's formulation was that he was prepared "if I be given a hearing (not before some partial commissioners, whose report is little to be trusted, but before the ears of Your Noblenesses, whom it also concerns), to explain myself more amply to the proponents of the Catechism." [182] Coornhert's refusal to appear before a committee—as he had in Leiden in 1578—seems to show that he had no desire for a public religious disputation. Assemblies of the States were by definition closed. It was the ministers who were eager to defend their doctrine before "all the world". In the run-up to the colloquy in The Hague, Coornhert's lack of co-operation created an impasse, which the ministers turned to their advantage by ably lobby-

---

gheweest, al seen valsche ketterije sien beschuldighen ende aenvechten, sonder dat ijet daer teghen ghedaen wordt."

[180] Ibidem.

[181] Ibidem.

[182] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 7: "[…] soomen my wil ghehoor verleenen (niet voor eenighe partijdige commissarissen, welcker rapport weinich is te betrouwen, maar voor U.E. ooren selve, dient ooc alles aengaat) my breeder daer op teghen den voorstanders deses Catechismi te verclaren."

ing the States for a debate in which the Reformed Church could step forth as public church.

In August 1583 there was no longer any suggestion that the Coornhert affair be turned over to Leiden professors. For the parties involved, the controversy had grown into a matter of the common interest, requiring the direct intervention of the States. This was also the greatest obstacle to a new encounter between the ministers and Coornhert. The States had serious reservations. Would a debate not just be pouring oil on the fire? The government opted for a soft approach. They would prefer to have Coornhert questioned in the presence of the ministers. This plan was along he same lines as the written exchange with Leiden professors provided for in the resolution of February 1583, and was to have a similar structure, with the ministers Cornelisz, Donteclock and Saravia taking the place of the professors. Although both Coornhert and the ministers were asked to speak in The Hague, there was not yet any question of a disputation.

Lobbying a Reluctant States

On 29 December 1582 Van der Corput wrote to Cornelisz that he had little hope "that the Lords of the States will do anything to wipe Coornhert's dung from the ministers."[183] He was probably writing with regard to Coornhert's *Proeve*, which was by then doing the rounds of an informal circuit of magistrates and preachers. Van der Corput was very close to being right. The States did not leap to the defence of the public church, but ultimately they would respond to the request submitted by Saravia, Cornelisz and Donteclock.

In the session of the States on 26 August 1583 the matter at hand concerning the Coornhert affair was explained in detail. The case would be put on the agenda for the next session. Prior to this meeting the deputies would have the opportunity to refer back to their respective city councils. The intention was to send a letter summoning Coornhert to render account "to the States or their deputies, and those of the Supreme Court."[184] The ministers, it seems, did not have to be summoned.

---

[183] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 29 December 1582, in *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 233.

[184] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 26 August 1583. The phrase "those of the council" refers to members of the Supreme Court.

Their participation in the coming debate was already taken for granted. The States were quick to mention explicitly that this was to take place "at the request of the ministers of the word" and "to complete the prior resolution of the States, and to prevent all further difficulties and inconveniences in the matter of religion." [185] Coornhert's condemnation was already part of the States' planning. According to the States he had published pamphlets "to great contempt of the congregation of Christ, and God's Holy Word and doctrine." [186] The intention of the States was that as soon as Coornhert had presented his case, they would "make further provision as is fitting."[187] The execution of the resolution made in February 1583 appeared to be imminent.

This time the States were serious, and they acted quickly. Coornhert received written notification that he would soon receive an official summons to appear before the next session of the States.[188] In their letter to Coornhert the States expressed themselves in relatively mild terms. They desired "to provide with all Christian order against all errors and disunity, that might arise in the religion and church of God, particularly due to what your nobleness has published in print." [189] There was no reference to the resolution passed in February, the basis for action by the States. The States informed Coornhert in more subtle terms that he was expected to explain himself "with such account and instruction, as will be fitting for the advancement and maintenance of God's doctrine, in the true religion, and for the service of the country." [190]

This mild tone could do nothing to disguise the partiality of the States, especially in the eyes of a man like Coornhert. He nevertheless responded to the invitation willingly, albeit with the necessary (and customary) reserve. In a letter to the States he showed himself ready to co-operate, although he also gave the impression that he was only

---

[185] Ibidem.
[186] Ibidem.
[187] Ibidem.
[188] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 30 August 1583; Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 16. These texts are almost identical.
[189] Ibidem: "met alle Christelijcke ordre te doen voorsien tegens alle onverstandt ende oneenigheyt, die inde religie ende kercke Godes soude mogen rijsen, sonderlingh 't gene dat van wegen U.E. in druck wordt uytgegeven."
[190] Ibidem: "met alsulcke verantwoordinghe ende onderrechtinghe, als tot voorstandt ende onderhoudt van Godes leere, inde ware religie, ende tot dienste van den lande bevonden sal worden te behooren." This formulation derives from Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 16. In the minutes of the States of Holland the phrase "for service of the country" is omitted.

agreeing out of a sense of duty. He summarized the contents of the letter of the States as a communication that he "was to be summoned to appear before somebody somewhere", which hardly attests to a large dose of enthusiasm.[191] The lack of any resistance to the plans of the States on Coornhert's part, in contrast to his recalcitrant attitude on the eve of the Leiden debate, does however lead one to suspect that the summons of the States had a more profound impact than he was willing to let on. In the spring of 1583 he had himself drawn up a petition in which he expressly asked for an opportunity to render account to the States in his own voice.[192] Though cool on the surface, Coornhert was very worried that a trip to Enkhuizen for his work might prevent him from responding in a timely fashion when the summons from the States arrived. By informing the States of his temporary absence he hoped to prevent any difficulties.[193]

Coornhert would not long be left in suspense as to the date he was expected in The Hague. On 16 September he received a second letter from the States, requiring that he present himself in The Hague on Wednesday, 21 September. The commissioners of the States would assemble on that day, so that "the ministers and you shall be heard before them, both in accounting for and fully explaining that which shall be Christianly proposed and treated in good order and recorded as is fitting."[194] The composition of an ad hoc committee, "appointed from both the cities as well as the Supreme Court and provincial Court of Holland", must have reinforced Coornhert's conviction that a religious disputation was to take place in The Hague. The States, however, were not giving away any details and in their letter vaguely described the pending meeting as "the aforesaid matter".[195]

---

[191] Ibidem.

[192] *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 85–86. Becker provides a draft of the petition in question; as far as I have been able to verify, there is no record of it having been received by the States. It is probable that Coornhert never submitted his request to the States, but he did petition the magistracy of Haarlem. This piece is roughly similar (although without a request to be heard before the assembled States) and is mentioned in Coornhert, *Disputatie,* 109–111. See p. 190.

[193] Coornhert to the States of Holland, 15 September 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 16–17.

[194] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583: "daer vooren de predicanten ende U.E. gehoort sullen worden, soo wel inde verantwoordinge als geode onderrechtinge op 't gunt christelijck aldaer sal wroden voorgehouden ende met goede ordre gehandelt ende aengeteyckent als na behooren."

[195] Ibidem.

The indefinable terminology of the States was not limited to their correspondence with Coornhert. In the resolution of 16 September, on the basis of which the second letter to Coornhert was drafted, does not use the words 'disputation' or 'colloquy'. The States referred simply to "the discussion" (*'t bespreck*), giving no definite idea of the precise nature intended.[196] The religious disputation held in Delft in February 1577, was at the time referred to as a "disputation", "colloquy" and "discussion".[197] These terms were to some extent interchangeable. Some civic magistrates thought the latest resolution of the States might mean that Coornhert was to be interrogated, others expected a disputation. Those who saw it as a disputation, were opposed to any arrangement in which Coornhert was to take part. They hoped to convey their disapproval through the negative connotations that the word 'disputation' had acquired. The commission by which the States appointed commissioners indicated they were at this stage thinking in terms of an interrogation of Coornhert for the "conservation and authority of the government of these lands."[198] As the ministers had argued in their petition, and as the States now agreed, the Coornhert affair was now an affair of state.

In the session of the States on 16 September 1583 the matter came to a head: the Coornhert affair was to be put to a vote of the members of the States. It is exceptional that the voting tally is preserved in the resolution books of the States. [199] In combination with a series of civic resolutions passed in response to the summons issued by the States, these data shed light on the position that the States was taking. [200] It also appears that the form and content of the gathering envisaged by the States, at this stage in the decision-making process, still open to a variety of interpretations.

The resolution, determining that a meeting, or "communication", between Coornhert and a number of ministers was to take place on 22 September 1583, was adopted by the States on a vote of nine in favour and six against.[201] At first sight this looks like a clear majority in favour

[196] Ibidem.
[197] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [6v], [10r].
[198] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583.
[199] Ibidem.
[200] *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 86–90.
[201] Votes in favour: the knighthood, Dordrecht, Haarlem, Leiden, Amsterdam, Brielle, Alkmaar, Enkhuizen and Medemblik; votes against: Delft, Gouda, Rotterdam,

of a meeting.[202] This can be questioned, however. There is less distance between the proponents and the opponents when the reasons behind the civic resolutions are taken into account. The proponents agreed on the express condition that the discussions provide the grounds (and legitimacy) for a condemnation of Coornhert on the basis of the 1581 edict. In the decree of the States there was already a close connection between "discussion" and "condemnation". The civic resolutions of Leiden and Amsterdam accordingly stated clearly that at the conclusion of the session between the ministers and Coornhert "there be proceeded and provision made in support of the church of God and the Christian religion as will be found to be necessary" (Leiden) and "then the business be disposed of against the aforesaid Coornhert, as shall be found to accord with the support of the church of God and the Christian religion" (Amsterdam).[203]

Those in favour of the discussion did not use the words 'debate', 'disputation' or 'colloquy'. On the contrary, they envisaged a hearing in which Coornhert would be called to account for the *Proeve*, rather than an exchange of views and arguments. In order to apply the 1581 edict it was important that Coornhert be "heard", and that "cognizance" be taken of his ideas.[204] Only then was a balanced decision possible, and one that could be presented to the populace as impartial. There was no mention of the presence or participation of the ministers.

Those opposed to the discussion, on the contrary, were not shy of labelling the meeting intended by the States a "disputation". The city government of Rotterdam even expected this to be a public disputation and informed their deputy that "on behalf of this city there will be no favouring of any public disputation between the ministers of the church and the aforesaid Coornhert."[205] From Gouda came the

---

Schiedam, Hoorn and Edam. Of the towns with votes, Gorinchem, Monnickendam, Purmerend and Schoonhoven are unaccounted for.

[202] Compare *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 86–87. The author states that most of the cities consented to the decision of the States, suggesting that the resolution of the States had been adopted before the cities had been written to.

[203] *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 88–89: "in der zaecken voorts gedaen ende voorzien mocht warden, als tot voorstand der kercke Godes ende der christelycker religie bevonden zoude warden nodich te zyn" (Leiden) and "alsdan in der zaecke gedisponeert zal worden tegens den voors. Coornhardt, als tot voorstandt van de kercke Godes ende christelicke religie bevonden zal worden te behooren" (Amsterdam).

[204] Ibidem, 88.

[205] Ibidem, 88–89: "men van wegen deser stede in eenige publycque disputatiën tusschen den kerckendienaren ende Coornhert voorn. nyet en sal bewilligen."

message that the city government thought it by no means advisable "that assent be given that the aforesaid ministers should enter into disputation with the aforesaid Coornhert, as great disedification of the commonalty and division in the church is like to follow from it, such that it were better for the time to leave this business be." [206] It is clear that these cities used the term "disputation" to reinforce their disapproval. The word appears to have acquired exceptionally negative associations. With the spectre of a religious disputation looming, these cities on 16 September 1583 collectively declared "that the fiscal shall proceed against the aforesaid Coornhert, in accordance with the edict and resolution, that he is found to have infringed upon." [207]

This aversion to disputations, or colloquies, was not limited to the city fathers of Gouda and Rotterdam. The votes in the session of 16 September even show that initially a majority of the deputies were opposed to a "discussion" in which both Coornhert and the ministers were given the floor. This almost unanimous disapproval may explain why the cities Delft and Schiedam lined up with the cities who opposed the intended "communication". After all, the city government of Delft had allowed its judgement to be determined by "the preferences of the nobility and the deputies of the other cities" while the deputy of Schiedam had been ordered "to conform to the most votes, always serving to promote the religion."[208] According to the minutes, however, when the resolution was put to a vote a nine-six majority came out in favour of a "discussion". [209] What had caused the change of mood?

The first factor was the voting behaviour of the nobility, which declared in favour of a "discussion". The position taken by the knighthood probably brought a couple of cities over the floor, so that the final balance shifted to a clear majority in favour of the proposal. The second factor was that the content of the decree concerning the "discussion" will have put some critics in a mild frame of mind. The cities that were still concerned that any "discussion" might be shipwrecked,

---

[206] Ibidem, 88: "dat men [niet] sall accorderen, dat dvoors. dijenaren met den voorn. Coornhert daerop in disputatie sall treden, overmits daeruut een groote onstichtinghe der gemeente ende scheuringe in der kercken volgen soude, sulcx dat beter waer voor deese tijt de saecke te laten berusten."

[207] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583: "dat by den fiscael tegens den voorn Coornhart geprocedeert sal worden, achtervolgens voorgaende placate ende resolutie, alsoo bevonden wort hem daer tegens misgaen te hebben."

[208] Becker, *Bronnen*, 89.

[209] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583.

could be reassured that the States had put the proposed "discussion" firmly in the framework of the February resolution. The powers of the commissioners went well beyond the listing of theses "taken from the books made and published by the aforesaid Coornhert", on which to base the "discussion". The closing sentence of the commission speaks volumes about the intention of the States: "also giving the aforesaid commissioners further charge, to act to provide therein according to the prior edicts and ordinances, should further action be necessary, thereafter reporting all to the States." [210]

Matters were clarified by the official orders of the States to the ad hoc committee set up to organize the discussion. This letter of commission is dated 16 September 1583 and was probably presented to the assembly the same day. In the absence of this formal document the cities had been able to reach different conclusions about the exact nature of the pending encounter. Not even the official orders of the States to the commissioners ended the ambiguity completely. The States prescribed a discussion that had the format of a religious colloquy, but was still not far from being a political hearing.

The ad hoc committee consisted of eleven commissioners, eight of them drawn from the Supreme Court and the Court of Holland (referred to as Provincial Court). [211] The remaining three commissioners were members of the States, to wit *jonkheer* Johan van Mathenes, Nicolaas van der Laan and Willem Bardesius. [212] The States hoped that such an eminent panel would have sufficient authority to ensure an orderly religious disputation, to be held on 22 September 1583 in The Hague "at a place fitting". The commissioners were given the task of compiling a list of theses on the basis of which it would be possible to "proceed […] to Christian accounting, proof and instruction." These theses were to be drawn from Coornhert's works—not just the *Proeve*, but also writings opposing the legitimacy of the "ministers' calling". The States also ordered that notes of the discussions be kept. [213]

---

[210] Ibidem: "gevende de voorsz. commissarissen oock vorder last, met'er daet daer in te doen voorsien achtervolgende voorgaende placaten ende ordonnantiën, soo verre anders yet gedaen ofte gehandelt soude mogen worden, doende daer na van alles rapport aen de Staten."

[211] Ibidem. From the High Council: Dirck van Egmond van der Nieuburgh, Gerard van Wijngaarden, Sebastiaen van Loosen, Gijsbrecht van Hoogendorp, Jan van Bancken and Nanninck van Foreest. From the Court of Holland: Leonard Casembroot and Joost de Menijn.

[212] Ibidem. Bardesius was a deputy of Amsterdam.

[213] Ibidem.

The mandate that the commissioners received from the States makes it clear that the government had taken the ministers' petition of August 1583 to heart. In February 1583 the States justified their measures against Coornhert solely by reference to the need "to support the truth, and divine doctrine, and Holy Writ." [214] The commissioners however were to be conscious that their work was not only in the service of the honour of God, but also to advance "quietness and unity, as well as for the conservation and authority of the government of these lands (*rust ende eenigheyt, midtsgaders tot conservatie ende authoriteyt vande overigheyt der landen*)."[215] The theological debate had now come to serve the unity and concord of the land.

Thus far the aims of the discussions in The Hague fit the criteria for a 'political disputation' in two important ways. [216] The government took the initiative in organizing the meeting, and chose to use the format of a disputation, originally an academic teaching exercise, to legitimize a relatively new religious order. There is no mention in the orders to the commissioners of the possibility of the disputation being public. There was, however, a final stipulation that echoes the reservations of the members of the States, deputized by their equally fearful city governments. The mandate of the commissioners was extended to the power to enforce existing edicts and proclamations.[217] This guaranteed Coornhert's conviction, as his guilt had already been fixed by the resolution of February 1583. The boundary between religious disputation and political interrogation was still fluid.

The orders of the States as formulated on 16 September 1583 were never carried out. The parties did gather in The Hague on 21 September, but the intended "discussion" never took place. Now the effects were felt of the lack of enthusiasm within the States for anything that smacked of a religious disputation. Coornhert was able to disrupt the fragile balance in the assembly of the States by setting high demands of the coming "discussion". The States had informed him by letter that he and the ministers were to be heard "in accounting for and fully explaining that which shall be Christianly proposed." This was to proceed in "good order", with notes taken "as fitting".[218]

---

[214] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 11 February 1583.
[215] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583.
[216] See p. 67.
[217] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583.
[218] Ibidem.

Coornhert regarded these provisions as too general and summary. He wanted more details about how the minutes were to be kept "in this intended business", how the debate was to proceed, and what financial provisions had been made for the gathering. [219]

Coornhert set out his demands at the first opportunity. On 21 September he arrived in The Hague, as the States had commanded him to do. The start of the "talk" was planned for the following day. In the customary manner, Coornhert and the ministers would then be instructed in the course that the debate was to follow. This preliminary meeting could also, if necessary, be used to reach more detailed agreements with the participants. Coornhert, however, seized the initiative and read out a written declaration. Whenever he felt in a tight spot, as during the preliminary talks prior to the Leiden disputation, he invoked his citizenship of Haarlem. Coornhert's opening sentence in The Hague can therefore be regarded as symptomatic of his mistrust towards the commissioners: "Before any start is made I, D. Volckhert Coornherts, declare as a citizen of the city of Haarlem, that I obediently present myself here in The Hague without relinquishing the least of my civil rights, or of the privileges of the said city."[220] His appearance did not entail his unconditional participation in the discussions. He first wanted to be assured that he could participate "without harm to my conscience", "in the service of God, the people, and the country".[221] A condemnation of Coornhert on the basis of an orderly "discussion" of theses suddenly seemed a lot less likely.

The commissioners must have listened with mounting unease to Coornhert's frequent references to the so-called protocol of Frankenthal.[222] This was a detailed record of an extensive religious disputation between Reformed ministers and a number of Baptist spokesmen, presided over by Elector Palatine Frederick III, 'the Wise', in 1571. The protocol, providing the minutes of the discussions, had stirred Coornhert's admiration and he asked that a number of

---

[219] Coornhert's declaration to the States of Holland, 21 September 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 21–22.

[220] Ibidem, 21: "Voor allen beginne verclare ick D. Volckhert Coornherts als burgher der stede Haarlem, dat ick int minste nyet en voornemen en ben te buyten te gaan mijn burgerrecht, ende die privilegiën der voorsz stede, met dit mijn onderdanigh verschijnen alhier in den Haghe."

[221] Ibidem.

[222] *Protocol, dat is: alle handelinge der t'samensprekinghe tot Franckenthal [. . .] gehouden, metten genen diemen wederdoopers noemet* (1571).

passages be declared applicable to the course of affairs in The Hague. In Frankenthal each party had been assigned their own notary and the elector had indemnified the Baptists for any expenses.[223] Coornhert was aiming for a full-fledged debate and wanted The Hague to be his come-back for the humiliation of Leiden. His aims were not at all what the States had intended, namely a brief "discussion" that would justify taking action against Coornhert. Although Coornhert was not aware of the breadth of the commissioners' mandate, the fact that the parties had had to present themselves in The Hague within five days of the States having passed the resolution will have been reason enough for mistrust. Might the meeting be intended as a *pro forma* session, simply to justify putting earlier resolutions into effect?[224]

It is hard to imagine that the intended talks were held after Coornhert's provocative behaviour on 21 September. We do not have certainty either way. The only source we have for Coornhert's written statement to the commissioners is Coornhert himself. Because he does not give the date, it has always been taken as part of the proceedings of the disputation in The Hague.[225] But the disputation proper did not begin until a fortnight later. Coornhert's account of the debate in The Hague in this respect shows similarities to his account of the discussions in Leiden. In the preliminary stages there were developments that Coornhert passes over in silence in order to disguise his uncooperative behaviour. The minutes of the States are also silent concerning the further progress of the talks.

It is likely that the commissioners sought the advice of the States, as they had done in Leiden. The States will have suspended further discussions between the parties. The Coornhert affair was not, however, put off any further: on 2 October the States issued a second mandate to a newly appointed ad hoc committee, entrusting it with organizing the next meeting in The Hague.[226] That Coornhert's demands were not met is worth notice. The new arrangements had been drafted after private consultation between the States and the ministers. Cornelisz

---

[223] Coornhert's remonstrance to the States of Holland, 21 September 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 21–22.

[224] Coornhert's suspicions perhaps inspired his first demand: "That such Christian equality be maintained in this intended business, that the one party enjoy no advantage over against the other." Ibidem, 21.

[225] Coornhert's declaration can be dated to 21 September with certainty given its literal quotation from the States' letter of invitation for the meeting on that day.

[226] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

even prepared a draft version of the new commission.[227] It is clear that it was now Cornelisz and his colleagues who were aiming for a debate with an important public purpose. The ministers would have liked to have the minutes of the pending debate published. In this lull there was also an important interview with the Prince of Orange, who had to be convinced of the necessity of a religious disputation in which the participants were perceived to be on more equal terms.[228] Saravia was no doubt important in bringing the Prince round to favouring the debate.

Major changes had been made to the new terms of reference for the ad hoc committee.[229] The intended hearing had become a "colloquy", a much less ambiguous term than "discussion".[230] The ministers referred to the participants in the debate as "colloquists".[231] There could now be no question of interrogating Coornhert, and the meeting had been given quite a different status. The ministers wanted to defend themselves freely against the "charges and accusations" that Coornhert had publicly levelled against them.

The revised mandate to the commissioners dropped the whole idea of a debate based on theses. Instead, a "free" debate was to be held in The Hague. At least, the order of the debate would be determined by the commissioners, "as they shall think most fitting." The drawing up of a series of theses in advance made it possible to steer the debate in a particular direction and abstract from the offensive text of the *Proeve*. This principle was now abandoned.[232] The second mandate also lacked any reference to the execution of earlier resolutions and edicts. The implementation of this order was no longer linked to the outcome of the discussion. The changed nature of the debate lent itself less clearly to such linkage. With no clear structure laid down in advance, the outcome of the debate became less certain. Furthermore, it must have been at this stage that the ministers passed on their desire to

---

[227] Memorial of Cornelisz to the States of Holland (copy), September 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[228] Ibidem; Cornelisz speaks of a "prior communication with his Excellency." Pieter Bor also seems to have been aware of an interview with the prince, stating as he does that the States acted "by advice of the Prince of Orange." Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 18, 35v.

[229] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

[230] Ibidem.

[231] Memorial of Cornelisz to the States of Holland (copy), September 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[232] Ibidem.

reach a settlement with Coornhert. Such an outcome would neutralise the *Proeve* and take away any immediate need to take action against Coornhert under the terms of the 'book edict'.

The States were still considering taking punitive action against Coornhert in the longer term, action to be implemented by individual cities. For this reason they wanted to oblige deputies to the States—themselves mostly representatives of the various city governments—to be present at the disputation in so far as possible. The States hoped to build up support for measures against Coornhert by involving city delegates more closely in the issue. The number of commissioners was greatly extended, with two representatives of the knighthood and one each from Dordrecht, Haarlem, Delft, Leiden, Amsterdam, Gouda, Rotterdam, Gorcum, Alkmaar, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. It would furthermore be put to William of Orange that the religious disputation should only take place in the presence of the representatives of the cities. This would make it possible, after the conclusion of the discussions, to take measures against Coornhert in the cities "with greater respect and authority". The States hoped that this "advice" to the Prince would lead William to issue a special appeal to the civic regents. [233]

It is not clear whether the revised decree issued by the States was put to a vote in the assembly. It is probable that the second mandate to the ad hoc committee was drafted within the terms of the resolution of 26 September 1583. We do know that a second invitation was sent out to the cities, asking them to send a delegate to The Hague in good time.[234]

In their second mandate to the ad hoc committee for the organization of a religious disputation, the States sided with the Reformed Church as never before. The new commission showed the express involvement of the States. The disputation was now linked not only to the honour of God, the authority of the States, the unity of the country and public peace and order, but in the second mandate the States explicitly took action as the protectors of the public church. The document opened with the following unambiguous statement of support for the Reformed Church: "in all sound and well-ordered republics, and namely in such to which God Almighty has extended his grace to

[233] A summons from the stadholder to the cities was, in the regular convocation of the States, binding upon the cities to deputize a representative to the assembly of the States. Koopman, *De Staten van Holland*, 180.

[234] *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 89–90.

have and to practice the true Christian Reformed religion, no disputes or doubts [should be] made or moved in matters touching the said religion, once it has been firmly and finally accepted."[235]

The States were aware that their religious policy had lacked firmness. The disputation in The Hague was intended to lend legitimacy to more forceful action against Coornhert. The aim of the discussion remained the desire of the ministers to "stop the mouth" of opponents such as Coornhert. A religious disputation was all the better suited to such an end, in the view of the States, because such a gathering took away any appearance of the States implementing a policy of constraint of conscience.

Let it be clear that the revised mandate of the States was a victory for the ministers. Their August 1583 petition to the States was being granted in full. The government was putting its weight behind the Reformed Church and confirming its status as the public church. The hearing of Coornhert that the States had initially envisaged might have given the impression that the ministers could not defend themselves without resort to force. On the basis of a series of hand-picked theses the commissioners could easily have ferried the ministers through the "discussion". After Coornhert had made his own demands clear on 21 September 1583, the ministers used the impasse in the discussions to bring about their ideal debate.

This might lead one to think that the resistance of the cities had been overcome, but that was not at all the case. The ministers had successfully lobbied a number of influential members of the States, members of the Supreme Court and even the Prince of Orange himself for a public disputation. The meeting in The Hague was no longer to be a questioning of Coornhert. The roles had been reversed: the ministers would be presenting their defence of Reformed doctrine, so that Coornhert could be silenced. According to the second mandate to the ad hoc committee, it was not Coornhert who was being heard against the ministers, but the ministers who were being heard against Coornhert.[236] Cornelisz had even proposed that Coornhert be given

[235] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583: "[. . .] in alle goede ende wel-geordonnneerde republiquen, ende namentlijck inde gene daer Godt Almachtigh sijn genade verleent heeft, omme te hebben ende te gebruycken de ware christelijcke gereformeerde religie, [behooren] geen disputen of twijffelachtigheyt [. . .] gemaeckt of gemoveert te worden in saecken de voorsz religie aangaende, die eens vastelijck ende eijndelijck zijn beslooten ende aengenomen."

[236] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

complete freedom to vent his gall. [237] This crucial turn in the structure of the debate was not communicated to the cities. In the invitation to the "principal towns",[238] requesting that the city governments in question deputize one of their number to attend the proceedings on 24 October, the old formula was retained. [239]

The purpose of the meeting in The Hague, according to the invitation sent to the cities, was "to make Coornhert answer that which the ministers have to complain of." [240] There was even still mention of a very broad mandate to the commissioners that—if necessary—would enable them to take punitive measures against Coornhert, "as before".[241] This did not agree with the ad hoc committee's new terms of reference, which would only be communicated to the representatives of the cities at their arrival in The Hague. It seems that it was necessary to hoodwink the cities into sending representatives to The Hague. These members of the States were no proponents of religious disputation. More than one might at first think, the ministers saw their wishes granted in spite of a divided and largely apprehensive States.

[237] Memorial of Cornelisz to the States of Holland (copy), September 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[238] To wit: Dordrecht, Haarlem, Delft, Leiden, Amsterdam, Gouda, Rotterdam, Gorinchem, Alkmaar, Hoorn and Enkhuizen.

[239] This is reflected in the wording of the civic deputizations in the town council records of Delft, Leiden and Alkmaar. *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 89–90.

[240] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 10 October 1583.

[241] Ibidem.

CHAPTER SIX

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: THE DISPUTATION IN THE HAGUE (1583)

In the Binnenhof

Early in the morning of Thursday 27 October 1583 a remarkably varied assembly gathered in the main hall of the Supreme Court in the Binnenhof, an enclosed square in which government and judicial bodies were situated in The Hague. Men of state, magistrates from all corners of the country, and numerous fairly youthful clergymen mingled with a more lively company of curious citizens. [1] These last will have looked forward with glee to the spectacle about to unfold. The officeholders and ministers would have been full of expectation too, but considerably less carefree. The Coornhert affair had dragged on for almost six years, to the detriment of the authority of the States and of the public church. Would the approaching disputation provide a solution, or should even greater unrest be feared?

It was the first time that a religious disputation had ever taken place in the Binnenhof. In a sense, the choice of venue, the main hall of the Supreme Court, was arbitrary, since the debate was not to be conducted before a formal sitting of the Supreme Court. [2] When the States, an administrative organ without fixed abode, assembled in The Hague it was generally in one of the chambers off the Binnenhof close to the

---

[1] There is no way of telling exactly how many people turned up for the religious disputation. The minutes record only which commissioners were present. Others attending are mentioned only as "various bystanders and listeners." Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 28.

[2] The instruction of the States making provision for the religious disputation in The Hague can be found in the register of resolutions, ordinances, edicts and commissions of the Supreme Court (1582–1789). See NA, Archief Hoge Raad (HR), inv. no. 1297, fos. 30v–31v. The piece falls into the final category of commissions and is registered as "Act of his Excellency the Prince of Orange and of the States of Holland allowing a colloquy between Dirck Volckertsz Corenhert on the one side and the ministers of God's word on the other side in the presence of the supreme court and deputies of the towns of Holland." The registers for the early years of the Supreme Court make no mention of the disputation.

Stadholder's quarters; but presumably none of these rooms was available for long enough at a time. The *ad hoc* committee delegated to deal with the Coornhert affair therefore decamped to the hall of the Supreme Court a little further on. [3] This would presumably have been at the suggestion of some of its members, who were closely involved in organizing the disputation.

Given the location, and the prominent role that was to be played by half a dozen members of the Supreme Court, it bears emphasizing that this was a religious disputation under the aegis of the States, rather than the Court as such. [4] Although these "men of state," including the most respected legal minds in Holland, owed their places on the committee overseeing the disputation to their positions as members of the Supreme Court, nevertheless they were formally each deputized individually as a commissioner of the States. They were not there in their capacities as members of the Supreme Court. This is why the States named each member individually in their official instructions concerning the disputation.[5] Had this been a judicial procedure before the Supreme Court or, in a more or less formal sense, a debate under the auspices of that body, then the States could simply have referred the matter to the Supreme Court. Furthermore, had this been the case, the Court's president, Johan van Treslong,[6] would have taken some part in the proceedings. The record of the debate gives no indication that he was even present.

The presence of the members of the Supreme Court at the disputation raised the debate's political implications considerably. The Supreme Court had been instituted as the highest court of appeal for Holland less than a year before, and from the first it played an important political role alongside the Prince of Orange and the States of

---

[3] Koopmans, *Staten van Holland*, 88–90; Paul Knevel, *Het Haagse bureau: 17de-eeuwse ambtenaren tussen staatsbelang en eigenbelang* (Amsterdam, 2001), 11–12, 26–27.

[4] In light of the directing role of the States and the lack of any form of judicial process, the disputation cannot in any sense be considered a successor to the heresy trials of the first half of the sixteenth century, in which heretics had to give account of their beliefs before secular tribunals such as a bench of aldermen or the provincial court. Compare Cornelis Augustijn, "Die Ketzerverfolgungen in den Niederlanden van 1520 bis 1545", in *Ketzerverfolgung im 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Silvana Seidel Menchi, Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 51 (Wiesbaden, 1992), 52.

[5] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

[6] C. Verhas, *De beginjaren van de Hoge Raad van Holland, Zeeland en West-Friesland* (The Hague, 1997), 35.

Holland. The establishment of the Supreme Court advanced Holland's prestige and curtailed the powers to which the Court of Holland could lay claim.[7] In the Supreme Court, the Prince was assured of an influential and reliable advisory body. It functioned as the highest judicial power within Holland and, no less importantly, as a subordinate to the Prince of Orange and to the States. [8] The extent to which, in this period, government and judiciary were intertwined can be seen from the appointments procedure for members of the Supreme Court. The Prince held sole authority to make appointments. In March 1581 he chose the first nine councillors, to be appointed for life, from a list of leading jurists drawn up by the States of Holland. [9] The six men whom the States deputized to organize the disputation in The Hague had all been among these first appointments to the Court, a "select clique of learned men with considerable experience in justice and/or administration."[10]

In the *ad hoc* committee that the States had appointed to oversee the disputation, the word of the six members of the Supreme Court carried considerable weight. Coornhert referred to these men as the "chief commissioners" of the debate.[11] It would be hard to say which of them was the most powerful or prestigious. Gijsbert van Hogendorp [12] and Johan van Banchem (1540–1601) [13] were both successful lawyers; Van Banchem had built up a busy practice in Leiden. Diederik van Egmond van der Nieuburg (1537–1596), [14] Gerard van Wyngaerden [15]

---

[7] Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland* , 142–143. Koopmans here relies heavily on De Blécourt, who put the establishment of the Supreme Court in the context of the power politics of the Prince of Orange. See A. S. de Blécourt, "De geboorte van den Hoogen Raad van Holland en Zeeland", *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 2 (1920–1921), 428–459.

[8] Christel Verhas, "Rechtspraak in hoogste instantie in de Nederlanden. 'De Hoge Raad van Holland, Zeeland en West-Friesland' ", in *Handelingen van het tweede Hof van Holland symposium gehouden op 14 november 1997 in de Trêveszaal te Den Haag*, ed. R. Huijbrecht (The Hague, 1998), 13–19, esp. 19; Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland*, 143.

[9] Verhas, *De beginjaren van de Hoge Raad*, 35. It is remarkable that in the instructions of the State of Holland, the six commissioners from the Supreme Court are referred to as "all the lords of the High Council in Holland." See NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

[10] Verhas, *De beginjaren van de Hoge Raad* , 41.

[11] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 105.

[12] Van der Aa IX, 929.

[13] *NNBW* V, 25–26.

[14] *NNBW* III, 345.

[15] Koopmans, *De Staten van Holland*, 137.

and Sebastiaan van Losen[16] had been councillors of the Court of Holland since 1573. Finally, Nanning van Foreest (1519–1592) [17] had been pensionary of Alkmaar at the time of his appointment to the Supreme Court. These members, with the exception of Van Hogendorp and Van Losen, were among the most active and fully occupied members of the Supreme Court. [18]

The deputizing of these commissioners was yet another indication of the high priority that the States were according this disputation. The same can be said of the appointment of Joost de Menijn (ca. 1540–ca. 1600),[19] a gifted lawyer who worked for the Court of Holland. Coornhert could appreciate the value of these men's presence in quite a literal sense. At one point he suggested that conducting the debate in writing would save the country "great expense." Furthermore, it would mean that the commissioners would not have to be given leave from pressing daily business.[20] Quite apart from the financial repercussions of the meeting, the States had a lot riding on the disputation. Public concord, the standing of the public church, and the prestige of the States themselves, required that the disputation be placed under the direction of an expert and authoritative committee.

Many of those who attended that first day of discussions must have been impressed by the large number of commissioners the States had appointed. The composition of this *ad hoc* committee really was exceptionally large. Besides the seven members of the Supreme Court, no fewer than thirteen deputies of the States had been appointed. According to the instructions of the States these representatives of the nobility and the towns stood on an equal footing with the other commissioners, and they therefore formed a majority. [21] When the talks started, however, the commissioners from Rotterdam, Gouda, Gorinchem and Hoorn were absent. [22] As the disputation progressed, the number of members of the States in regular attendance shrank; on

---

[16] Van Loosen died in 1597. *NNBW* XI, 626. Van der Aa XI, 626.
[17] *NNBW* I, 881–882.
[18] Verhas, *De beginjaren*, 44.
[19] Van der Aa XII, 614–618.
[20] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 23.
[21] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.
[22] Those present were the lords Otto van Egmond and Van Kenenburgh (for the Knighthood), Jacob Pauli (Dordrecht), Jan van Zuren (Haarlem), Gerrit Biesen (Delft), Willen Jan Reyersz. van Heemskerk (Leiden), Philips Cornelisz. (Amsterdam), Jan Adriaensz. (Alkmaar), Jacob Joostensz. (Enkhuizen). At following meetings Rombout Hoogerbeets (Hoorn) and the Lord of Schagen, representing the Knighthood, also put in an appearance.

28 November 1583—when the debate was reopened after a three-week interruption—a nadir of four representatives had been reached.[23] From the fourth day of discussions onwards the only deputy of the Court of Holland, councillor De Menijn, failed to attend. The six members of the Supreme Court, the only members to be present throughout, in effect dominated the committee.

The main hall of the Supreme Court lent itself perfectly to a religious colloquy. Judicial hearings were also based on the principle of each side being heard in turn by a number of councillors, with members of the public in attendance. The spatial dispositions of the location must have been well suited to the requirements of the debate. After both parties, the commissioners, notaries, and members of the public had found their seats, the solemn moment arrived for the administration of the oath to Saravia and Coornhert. [24] They swore to conduct themselves with fitting respect for one another and to dispute honestly, "abstaining from any injurious and wrangling words." [25] This was followed by the undertaking in no wise to make the minutes of the debate public "in whole or in part, by ourselves or by others, directly or indirectly." The disputants had extracted the concession that the pieces could be read by "two or three discreet persons", should it be deemed necessary to apply to them for advice. [26] This was probably at the request of Saravia, who was flanked by Cornelisz and Donteclock. The notaries charged with keeping the minutes of the debate for Saravia and Coornhert were also sworn in with a similar formula. They promised to conduct themselves as "good and trustworthy notaries" and under no circumstances to give occasion for the dissemination of the minutes.[27]

Only the States, as "high authority," were entitled to decide whether and in what circumstances the minutes might be made public. [28] This

---

[23] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 75.

[24] Although Cornelisz was given a small part in the discussions (he was to read out the relevant article from Coornhert's *Proeve* at the beginning of each new round of discussions), Saravia was the only participant to speak on behalf of the ministers. The swearing-in therefore only applied to him.

[25] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 27.

[26] Ibidem.

[27] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 27–28. Jan Wolf took minutes for Saravia, Govart van Rijswijck for Coornhert. The notary of the Supreme Court, Anthonie Geniets, also took minutes; he was already under oath.

[28] Ibidem, 27.

apparently routine clause, subscribed to by both Saravia and Coornhert, cloaked a conflict which had almost sunk the whole disputation on the very eve of its opening.

Conditions

The colloquy in The Hague had been preceded by a preliminary discussion, as had been the case in Leiden in 1578. These negotiations took place behind closed doors on 25 and 26 October 1583. Due to the informal nature of the discussions—only the commissioners and the disputants were present—no minutes survive. [29] Two letters from Coornhert, one to the commissioners of the debate (dated 25 October 1583) and one to his wife Neeltje (dated 26 October 1583) provide some insight into the points at issue. [30]

Unlike in Leiden, the *status quaestionis* was barely touched on. The instructions of the States had already determined that Coornhert's *Proeve* was to be the basis of the dispute.[31] Coornhert himself had envisaged this. What is remarkable is that he did not make an issue of accepting the position of respondent in the debate. Prior to the discussions he had stated that he wished to stick to "my opposition to the Dutch Catechism", which implies the position of opponent.[32] The ministers had also earlier referred to him as "plaintiff".[33] Now Coornhert had agreed with the ministers "that they would refute the said *Proeve*, and he [. . .] justify it, [taking it] in order from the beginning to the end."[34] This gave Saravia much greater room for manoeuvre. Coornhert perhaps underestimated the implications of this agreement or—with typical bravado—overestimated his ability to play the role of respondent.

The preliminary talks in The Hague were above all concerned with the public status of the colloquy. The Reformed represented the public church; Coornhert was a public figure and voiced the dissatisfactions

---

[29] Cornelisz and Donteclock were also present at the preliminaries, although neither was to speak "into the pen" during the debate itself. Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 21.

[30] Ibidem, 21–26.

[31] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583.

[32] D.V. Coornhert, *Denck-schrift*, in Idem, *Disputatie*, 20.

[33] Memo from Cornelisz to the States of Holland (copy), September 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[34] Coornhert to the commissioners of the States of Holland, 26 October 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 23.

of a considerable segment of the populace. The States worried that the debate might be an occasion for unrest, perhaps even breaches of the peace, should the meeting be entirely open to the public and the record of it be disseminated in print. The States were convinced of the need to find a solution to the 'Coornhert affair', but at the same time wanted to limit any attendant risks. For this reason the authorities suggested a debate attended only by those invited. Although the States had allowed themselves to be talked into organizing a formal colloquy, the original plan for an *in camera* "discussion" still influenced their decisions. This led the States to refuse to accede to the wishes of the ministers on one important point, as formulated in the draft instructions for the debate. [35] In the ordinance that the States finally issued, there is no more mention of the intention of recording the debate *in situ* with an eye to publication. [36]

The commissioners of the States were in possession of broad powers, which gave them considerable discretion as de facto presiders over the debate. Their power of decision reached the limits of the States' instructions, which had been drafted in very general terms. The desired format of the debate is described as follows:

> giving the same or the most part of them [i.e. the commissioners, M.R.], authority and complete charge, to give such order for the said colloquy as they shall find best fitting, to the end that the said Coornhert should be heard concerning that which he has been bold to undertake contrary to the said ministers, in all Christian quietness, with all good discretion, honour and Christian consideration, so that everything may be undertaken, directed and brought to an end to the honour of God and in accordance with God's spirit and sacred word, as is needful to peace and unity, and to the conservation of the authority and government of these lands, without the aforesaid parties to the colloquy being allowed to exceed or trespass upon the limits, form or manner of proceeding laid out for them by the said commissioners .[37]

---

[35] See pp. 210–214.

[36] The draft instruction ends: "Furthermore, one or two worn notaries shall take down all that the parties briefly dictate *hinc inde* after sufficiently debating the arguments presented, afterwards to be published for the utility of Christ's church and confirmation of the truth &c." Cornelisz's memorial to the States of Holland (copy), September 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[37] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583: "gevende den selven of het merendeel van dien, authoriteyt ende volkomen last, omme alsulcke ordre op de voorz t'samenspreeckinge te stellen gelijck syluyden bevinden sullen best te behooren, ten eynde dat den voorsz Coornhart op 'tgene hy hem vermeten heft, mach gehoort worden tegens de voorsz dienaers, in alle christelijcke stilligheyt, met alle goede

There is no record of the specific ways in which the commissioners chose to put this very broad charge into effect, and we will therefore have to deduce them from what we know of the course of events in The Hague. The preliminary discussions shed some light on the original intentions of the commissioners. They had envisioned a colloquy behind closed doors, recorded only by the clerk of the Supreme Court and with neither of the disputants being given access to the minutes. Subsequent publication of this record was, naturally, out of the question.[38]

It was to be expected that Coornhert would controvert this manner of proceeding. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that the ministers also took issue with what the commissioners envisioned. They had, after all, been involved in designing the debate from the start. The informal nature of the contacts between the ministers and the commissioners means that they have left no record in the sources. Coornhert, in contrast, was an outsider in The Hague. At least, that was how he behaved. On 16 September 1583, when preparations for the disputation in The Hague seemed to have stalled, Coornhert had already invoked his rights as a citizen of Haarlem and made clear that he would take part only on certain conditions. [39] Although he was friendly with the commissioners Van der Nieuburg[40] and Van Zuren,[41] and could therefore have lobbied behind the scenes, Coornhert chose to communicate his demands formally, in a letter to the commissioners, in September 1583; [42] he again tried to influence the preliminary discussion on 25 October 1583 by means of a memorial, which he probably circulated himself to those concerned. [43]

---

discretie, eerbiedinge ende christelijck ghemoet, op dat alles na Godts geest ende heyligh woordt mach aengevangen, gedreven ende geeyndight worden ter eeren Godts, ende sulcx noodigh sal sijn tot rust en eenigheyt, midtsgaders tot conservative vande authoriteyt ende overigheyt deser landen, sonder dat de voorsz t'samenspreeckende partyen sullen mogen excederen ofte te buyten gaen de limiten, forme ofte manieren van handelinge by de voorsz commissarissen henluyden te prefigeren."

[38] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 21–25.

[39] See p. 209.

[40] Coornhert corresponded with Van der Nieuburg on theological issues. *Bronnen*, ed. Becker, 302–304; Hamilton, *The Family of Love*, 62.

[41] Coornhert and Van Zuren had jointly set up a printing shop in Haarlem in 1561. Valkema Blouw, "A Haarlem Press in Sedan and Emden", 225–250.

[42] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 21–22.

[43] Ibidem, 19–21.

Coornhert's memorial was supplementary to the conditions he had already set out in September. On the earlier occasion he had demanded the appointment of two independent notaries so that both parties would be in possession of authenticated copies of the minutes, which were to be taken down verbatim and signed by the disputants. Coornhert had also requested that the States pay his expenses. The disputation was, after all, a concern of the "commonweal," so Coornhert could see no reason why he should have to bear the charges of it as a private person.[44] In the note for the preliminary discussion on 25 October 1583 Coornhert again raised the question of the minutes and made further demands. An authenticated copy of the instructions of the commissioners should also be provided to him. He wanted to be able to see what the States were aiming to achieve. Were the commissioners to "hear and understand without giving judgement" or were they to be considered the judges of the case?[45]

Coornhert made it clear that he considered the committee unqualified to give a (final) judgement in the debate. Neither the Prince of Orange, nor the States, nor the various commissioners could act as judge of so weighty a cause (in which, according to Coornhert, truth was at stake, not some personal interest). Their knowledge of the Bible was insufficient, and furthermore they were not "with one accord" (*eendrachtelijck*) recognized as judges by the parties themselves. Coornhert even went so far as to speak of the partiality of the committee "since its members are themselves mostly of the religion that was reproved."[46] He would rather see the power to give a final judgement entrusted to "three or four" impartial experts, should it be possible to find them. As Coornhert considered this unlikely, he gave a final alternative:

> If such impartial men cannot, or will not, be found, then the same judges are to be had that pronounced upon Luther's doctrine in Germany, Zwingli's in Switzerland, and Calvin's in France and the Netherlands, namely, the people, whom it most concerns, and who after reading the Catholic writings, as well as the Lutheran, Zwinglian and Calvinist, each judged according to their own lights.[47]

---

[44] Ibidem, 21–22.
[45] Ibidem, 19.
[46] Ibidem.
[47] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 20: "Canmen sulcke onpartijdige luyden nyet becomen, of wilmen daar nyet aan, datmen dan neme de selve rechters, die in Duytschlant van Luthers, in Zwitserlant van Zwinghels, ende in Vranckrijck, oock in den Nederlanden vande calviniaensche leere het oordeel hebben ghegeven, namentlijck het volck, dient

During the preliminaries Coornhert accused the commissioners of trying to keep the disputation from the people. [48] He insinuated that their motives were far from honourable. Without notarized copies of the minutes, Coornhert's contribution to the debate could easily be misrepresented. Coornhert was not shy of giving expression to his suspicions in a letter to the commissioners. His call for copies of the minutes to be made available to all the participants was motivated not only by the need "to refresh the memory of each" at the end of the day, but above all as a "surety of the case." [49]

In the negotiations with the commissioners, Coornhert played two trumps. Firstly he presented himself as a public figure who represented the concerns of the people, hence his pleas for the discussions to be open to "all honourable folk, who should desire the same" and for publication of the minutes.[50] Secondly, he sought to legitimize his position by repeated references to the proceedings of religious disputations elsewhere. Thus Coornhert drew the attention of the commissioners to the minutes of the colloquy at Frankenthal, which the Elector Palatine had put into public circulation in 1571. Ten years previously the king of France had not shied away from publishing the *acta* of the colloquy of Poissy. He had wanted to convince public opinion that the decisive factor had not been violence or shows of force, but that "good and right reasons" had won the day in Poissy. [51] Coornhert's memorial, previous to the discussions, had also been lardered with such comparisons. [52] By this means he increased the pressure on the commissioners while at the same time trying to convince the ministers to take the same position. Saravia and his allies, after all, also saw what they were doing as comparable to colloquies such as those of Poissy and Frankenthal. [53]

In the negotiations Coornhert would not give an inch. His suggestions for breaking the deadlock (a written debate with each contribution exchanged through the clerk of the Supreme Court and a

---

oock meest aangaat, ende na 'tlesen vander catholijcken, oock vande luthersche, zwinghelsche, ende calviniaensche schriften gheoordeelt hebben ghehadt elck int sijne."

[48] Ibidem, 25: "I [. ..] stated my reasons, and (among them) that this business touching the light of truth, it should be treated of publicly in the light and not smothered in the dark."

[49] Coornhert to the commissioners of the States of Holland, 26 October 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 23.

[50] Ibidem.

[51] Ibidem, 24.

[52] Coornhert, Denck-schrift, in: Idem, *Disputatie*, 19–20.

[53] See pp. 69–70.

written request for advice to the Prince and the States) were set aside as unworkable.[54] The commissioners were caught in a dilemma. Giving in to Coornhert would increase the risk that the debate would lead to disorders; but rejecting his demands could be seen as a provocation. Coornhert had already announced that he would leave The Hague if the commissioners remained intransigent.[55] That would really mean trouble!

After a day of intensive talks Coornhert was presented with an ultimatum. He was to appear before the commissioners the following morning, to say whether or not he was willing to take part in the disputation on the terms that they set out. When Coornhert point-blank refused to do so, the deadlock was total. He was twice sent from chamber so that the commissioners could confer.[56] Coornhert was in a strong position, and the commissioners found themselves obliged to climb down in order to save the debate. Agreement was finally reached only after Coornhert had rejected the first compromise offered.[57] Two notaries would be appointed who would take down what was said in both the morning and the afternoon sessions. At the end of the day they were to collate and sign their reports. Both Coornhert and the preachers were to have access to a copy of the minutes not only during the disputation but also after it had concluded. The right to publish the record was, however, reserved to the Prince and the States. [58]

At the end of his second day at the Binnenhof, Coornhert had even more good news to communicate to his wife Neeltje. The disputation was to be open to the public, as Coornhert had demanded, and the commissioners had made their role explicit. They considered themselves judges "of the order of the disputation" (*van't beleedt vande disputatie*). In other words: they were to adjudicate the debate procedurally, but refrain from any judgement of its content—a 'limitation' that in fact would prove to conceal their greatest strength. Coornhert also benefited financially. The States would pay the fees of the notary placed

[54] Coornhert to the commissioners of the States of Holland, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 23–24.
[55] Ibidem, 19, 24.
[56] Coornhert to Cornelia Symonsdochter, 26 October 1583, in: Idem, *Disputatie*, 25.
[57] The single copy of the proceedings would be put at Coornhert's disposal for the duration of the debate, on condition that he make no copies from it. Ibidem.
[58] Ibidem.

at his disposal. The commissioners would refer back to the States for advice regarding the remuneration of more general expenses. [59]

The conclusion of the preliminary round of talks in The Hague meant that an important hurdle had been taken. The difference of opinion between the commissioners and Coornhert shows that the impending debate was a source of considerable tension, with all the associated risks for public order, but that this had not quite been enough to scuttle the discussions. The considerable political-religious importance of the disputation had, for now, overcome misgivings. Prior to the debate, deliberations barely touched on questions of content. Coornhert wanted the basis of disputation to be the Bible, but without excluding reference to the writings of the Church Fathers or of "modern" theologians.[60] His proposal met no objection from either the ministers or the commissioners. Five years earlier, the very same question had led to heated exchanges in the Leiden debate. [61]

Nevertheless, the fiasco of the Leiden debate hung over the disputation in The Hague like a shadow. In his memorial, Coornhert unambiguously indicated that he would not have the law laid down to him in The Hague as he had in Leiden, "for such would be no free, but a muzzled disputation, yea an inquisition." [62] With Saravia as opponent, however, he was facing a very different style of debate from that in Leiden. Somewhat to Coornhert's consternation, there was to be no repetition of the earlier occasion's antagonism. Saravia's attempts at neutralizing the conflict, however, would not meet with much success in The Hague.

Pertinentia

In The Hague it had been clear from the outset that Saravia would dominate the discussions. The minister had set himself an ambitious goal and refused to relinquish control of the debate. To give standing to the Reformed Church as the public church, he knew he would have to be successful in two ways. First he had to maintain his assault on Coornhert's *Proeve* in the face of the author's counterarguments. Then

---

[59] Ibidem.
[60] Coornhert, Denck-schrift, in: Idem, *Disputatie*, 20.
[61] See pp. 131–134.
[62] Coornhert, Denck-schrift, in: Idem, *Disputatie*, 20.

he had to ensure that the exchange of words did not give rise to a partisan struggle in which Coornhert and the Catechism were mutually exclusive extremes.

In response to this double requirement, Saravia did everything to show how much he deserved his established reputation as an intelligent and conciliatory divine. He used every opportunity that the disputation offered to present his efforts at reaching out to Coornhert as a question of 'pertinence', of a correct and relevant manner of disputation. His carefully worked out strategy of, as it were, glossing over the controversy by means of a 'pertinent' manner of argumentation, put Coornhert in the position of having to try to take the edge off Saravia's line of reasoning by showing it to be 'impertinent'. This raised the controversy to a more abstract level, in which the structure of the disputation itself became the stake of the debate.

The required order of the debate, what was known as its *pertinentia* (appropriateness), rested on a series of prior assumptions that were barely explicit. Coornhert listed a number of 'rules' for disputation in the memorial that had set out what was at issue in the preliminary negotiations with the commissioners. These precepts concerned questions of conduct ("The commissioners are to listen to the end", i.e. without interrupting a speaker) or form ("And no other proofs to tell or count, but only such as are taken from the canonical biblical writings").[63] But with these rules Coornhert was not coming close to the core issue of pertinence.

The structure of speaking back and forth was only very partially an issue of form and formality. Each argument should also be 'pertinent' to the content. As long as the argumentation was in accordance with the *status quaestionis* and was directed to the position already stated by the other party, the pertinence of the discussion was guaranteed. This resulted in fairly rigid prescriptions, relating to the requirements of logic or dialectic. Over the course of centuries this academic discipline had developed a tradition that could serve as a common basis for disputation.[64] The *respondens*, for instance, was not to bring in new evidence to defend his case, while this was precisely what was required

[63] Ibidem, 19–20.

[64] G. R. Evans calls attention to the continuing importance of this tradition in the first half of the sixteenth century, speaking of "the durability of the detailed texture of mediaeval logic". Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 87.

of the *opponens* for him to make his case.[65] In most instances, however, the division between 'pertinent' and 'impertinent' arguments was less clear-cut. It is not going too far to consider *pertinentia* as in some regards a subjective, even intuitive norm. What one speaker considered a relevant argument, another might see as a conscious attempt to duck the 'objectively' required proofs. We further have to take account of the possibility that the disputants might try to manipulate unwritten 'rules' to their own advantage.

The commissioners refrained from any attempt to judge the pertinence of the arguments put forward by Saravia and Coornhert. Their determination to adjudicate solely the "order" of the disputation meant that in practice they only intervened in the structure of the debate in the most elementary sense. They considered the *status quaestionis* and indicated whose turn it was to speak. The extent to which the content of speech accorded with the rules of the game was beyond their competence. Although the principles of the pertinence of the arguments used could very easily have been determined impartially—there was after all considerable consensus about the rules of disputation—the commissioners did not risk getting involved in this aspect of the disputation. Any statement concerning the practical application of the requirements of pertinence necessarily touched on the content of the debate and could therefore be presented as lacking impartiality.

From time to time Saravia acted as though he were chairing the debate. More than once he lectured Coornhert on how to dispute correctly.[66] The participants in the dispute were, indeed, obliged to act for themselves as the guardians of pertinence to the discussion. In The Hague it quickly became apparent that there was great disagreement about the order of the debate. With no neutral, authoritative body to clarify questions of pertinence (and to come down on the deliberate attempts of both sides to muddy the waters), cross-purposes proliferated. Every attempt in turn to establish an orderly exchange

---

[65] Kenny, Pinborg, "Medieval philosophical literature", 26–27.

[66] At the end of the third day of debate Saravia said, "Dear Coornhert, that which I have done in this, was not to burden you with unnecessary proofs, but to proceed orderly. Now it is so, that all order of well regulated disputations requires, that the disputant give account of his assertions, for that which is clear and beyond doubt to one, is dark and uncertain to another. Further whenever the disputant thinks, that something that is beyond all doubt is being left out of account, he may require the account and reason thereof from the respondent, so that you have no cause to complain in this matter." Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 43.

of opinions failed, until the commissioners—at Saravia's instigation—intervened and proposed a new *status quaestionis*.

Coornhert had expressed doubts beforehand about the possibility of achieving the required narrowness of focus in a verbal encounter. A debate in writing seemed to him to offer a sounder guarantee of an orderly exchange of views: "without impertinence," "ripely" and "briefly."[67] In his memorial he had, correspondingly, argued for pauses to be allowable when one of the parties had trouble formulating an immediate response. In such a case the disputant should be provided with a written summary of the issue pending. Coornhert proposed that a response should then be provided in full session by the following day at the latest. He suggested that the ministers might not be willing to entrust their cause to "the mouth of one man". In that case the debate could be conducted in writing, by an exchange of texts. Everything indicates that here Coornhert was projecting his own reservations onto his opponents. A debate in writing could, in his view, be conducted with greater circumspectness. Furthermore, in such a situation the ministers would be able to call in the assistance of as many theologians as they liked! Coornhert boasted and swaggered, all the while harbouring deep reservations about the disputation. [68]

Coornhert was all too conscious that in the person of Saravia he was facing a new calibre of theologian. When it came to speaking "the most pertinently," Coornhert acknowledged Saravia as his superior. "Which of us both shall be able to put his opinion most pertinently and most dialectically, I being so unlearned and without artistry must give way to you, seeing you are so learned", observed Coornhert on the very first day of the disputation.[69] His voice must have expressed a remarkable mixture of respect and irony. In this respect Coornhert would certainly have felt himself at a disadvantage, but at the same time, and with characteristic verbal dexterity, he played up this inequality for all it was worth. Against Saravia's technical capacities, directed to speaking "at the most pertinent," Coornhert set his desire to reason "at the most truthful".[70] This sleight of hand relied on a well-worn caricature of (medieval) scholastic logic as out of all touch with reality. Saravia's disputational practice, however, can much better be characterized as a

---

[67] Ibidem, 23.
[68] Coornhert, Denck-schrift, in: Idem, *Disputatie*, 20–21.
[69] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 35.
[70] Ibidem.

form of 'humanist dialectic' in which stringing together chains of logic (*ratiocinationes*) served the greater purpose of constructing a convincing argument.

Saravia's superior 'learnedness' was no obstacle to Coornhert's thwarting his strategy for the debate. Saravia was aiming for a settlement, while Coornhert's intention was precisely to resist being incorporated by Saravia's plans. This was proving hard, as his continual attempts to polarize matters simply glanced off the line of argument that Saravia was developing. This line was directed to minimizing the significance of the controversy and looking for points of agreement with Coornhert. The aims of the two men were so different that their exchanges could not be straightforward. The commissioners twice felt obliged to intervene to get the disputation back on track. The broad mandate they had received from the States, more or less giving the commissioners freedom to act as they thought fit, enabled them to adapt the debate's *status quaestionis* and the formal structure of the discussions.[71] Each of the two interventions of the commissioners led to an important turn in the progress of the disputation, so that it is possible to divide the proceedings into three stages. The opening stage ran from 27 to 29 October, with *pertinentia* functioning as the key concept.

The minutes of the disputation in The Hague make no mention of a formal opening of the debate. Prior to the Leiden debate, five years earlier, the parties had been prohibited from holding a "preface", because opening statements were seen as a potential cause of unrest. [72] It seems likely that the commissioners in The Hague were thinking along the same lines. At 8 a.m. on 27 October, the discussions were launched without preliminaries. Nothing was communicated in advance concerning the *status quaestionis* or the structure of the discussions. This was not a problem, in light of the agreements reached during the preliminary discussions. Saravia would take the part of *opponens* and subject Coornhert's *Proeve* to criticism. This treatise was made up of 56

[71] NA, StvH. Res. 2 Oktober 1583 "gevende [. ..] authoriteyt ende volkomen last, omme alsulcke ordre op de voorsz. t'samenspreeckinge te stellen gelijck syluyden bevinden sullen best te behooren.

[72] Coornhert, *Vande Leydtsche disputatie*, [21v].

articles, any one of which would have provided a point of departure for disputation.[73]

Given the structure of the *Proeve* as an attack on the Heidelberg Catechism, it might have made more sense for Coornhert to have taken the role of *opponens*. The commissioners' decision to give this part to Saravia was a direct result of their instructions from the States. This document states that the ministers desired to stop Coornhert's mouth. They had requested an opportunity to present proofs against "the misunderstanding and error that the aforesaid Coornhert presents in his aforesaid booklet" (meaning the *Proeve*).[74] Attack was accounted the best form of defence. Only as *opponens* would Saravia be in a position to steer the debate towards a bridging of the gulf between him and Coornhert.

As soon as Saravia began to speak, those present in the council chamber must have realized why the commissioners had refrained from any formal confirmation of the *status quaestionis*. Had they read out the first article of the *Proeve* and presented it as the *status* for discussion, they would have been ahead of matters. For Saravia raised an objection to the manner in which Coornhert had cited the Catechism in the first article of the *Proeve*. He then declared that the crucial contrast between the Catechism and the *Proeve* with regard to the (perfect) sanctification of the believer, a contrast that impacted all the articles of the *Proeve* and should have been the basis for disputation, was beside the point. In the very first minutes of the debate Saravia was already flagging a serious case of "impertinentia". Bor records in his account of the disputation that the minister addressed Coornhert chidingly. [75]

The stumbling block was the short introduction to the first article of the *Proeve*. Here Saravia saw a golden opportunity to unmask Coornhert as incompetent and unreliable. Saravia was all too eager—he was not lacking in bravura himself—to show how easily Coornhert's arguments could be demolished. The *Proeve* could not possibly, said Saravia, apply to the Catechism, because the treatise was based on a question nowhere to be found in the Catechism. Saravia kept his

---

[73] Coornhert, *Proeve*. The intervention of the commissioners on the sixth day of the disputation made clear that the intention of taking apart the whole *Proeve* had remained unchanged. Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 55.

[74] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 2 October 1583: "het onverstandt ende dwalingh die den voorn. Coornhart in sijn voorsz. boecxken is voorstellende."

[75] Bor, *Nederlantsche oorloghen*, vol. 2, bk. 18, 36r.

remarks brief and ended with a polite but urgent appeal to Coornhert "that he will show him where this question is to be found." [76]

In the first edition of his *Proeve* Coornhert had indeed embroidered on the Catechism's fifth question, "Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?" He had reformulated it: "whether the human believer by the grace of God can in this life perfectly keep Christ's command to love God and his neighbour?" [77] The explicit reference to the "believer" and the addition of "by the grace of God" he had considered necessary to prevent giving the false impression that any person could keep God's commandments without Christ's aid. He had, however, quickly corrected this "fault", after Van der Laan had voiced the very criticism that Saravia was to bring up. Coornhert responded irritably to Saravia's rebuke, indignantly recounting the trouble to which he had gone to correct the first edition of the *Proeve* by pasting over the passage in question.[78]

Coornhert's admission that he had been in error did not satisfy Saravia. He continued to harp on this one string, bringing ever greater weight to bear on the point. Coornhert may have corrected the formulation of the fifth question in the Catechism, but the rest of his pamphlet continued to apply to the old formulation. Coornhert's own formulation, according to Saravia, referred to a person who believed and was born again, while the fifth question of the Catechism should be taken as applying to the unregenerate. [79] This meant that there was in fact no difference of opinion with Coornhert, for Saravia and Coornhert both held that the unregenerate could not possibly keep God's commandments. Here Saravia laid his finger on a weak spot in the *Proeve* of which Coornhert himself was already conscious. While referring to questions 60 and 114 of the Catechism in the margin of the text, Coornhert had felt it necessary to convince his readers that the statements of the Catechism, including the fifth question, should also be taken as applying to those born again. [80]

Coornhert repeated this point in debating Saravia, but his opponent was unswayed. He patiently, and repeatedly, explained to Coornhert that the Catechism had a three-part structure and that the first part

---

[76] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 28.
[77] Ibidem.
[78] Ibidem, 28–29.
[79] Ibidem, 30.
[80] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 9.

(in which the fifth question was to be found) dealt with sinful, unregenerate man. Coornhert's criticism should therefore be taken as "utterly impertinent". When Coornhert, as in the *Proeve*, addressed the Catechism's fifth question, then the only thing to be debated was how it applied to the unregenerate. "The question here is not what the Catechism means elsewhere, or what we take from it, but what in this place it says", Saravia insisted, driving home his 'technical' victory. After one day of disputation, in which the exchange of views had been laborious, Coornhert and Saravia were no closer to one another on this point. The damage was considerable, for in the process the debate's *status quaestionis* had been obscured. Was the disputation about the unregenerate, or was it to be about those who had been born again?[81]

The second day of disputation provided a solution. The previous day's scouting had brought Saravia to the view that a meaningful debate would only be possible if the focus was on the regenerate. Coornhert was all in favour of this, for it was he who had originally posed the sanctification of the regenerate as the issue at stake. It was Saravia, however, who most turned the question to his own advantage. Where the first day had seen a debate in which the spotlight fell on the relationship between the *Proeve* and the Catechism, an issue that was to help determine the debate's *status*, on the second day Saravia presented these issues as quite unrelated. "Wishing to proceed to the principal matter", Coornhert agreed to this treatment, "not to appear disputatious for the honour of this incident". In conclusion he formulated the new *status* in terms that had earlier been used by Saravia: "Whether a person born again can or cannot in this life perfectly keep God's commandments of love." Coornhert's 'yea' stood against Saravia's 'nay'. The antithesis remained, but the Catechism had been safely set out of reach. In formal terms the *status quaestionis* adopted had nothing to do with the fifth question of the Catechism.[82]

Nevertheless, the Catechism was brought back into the firing line later the same day. Now that the debate had shifted from the introduction to the main text of the first article of the *Proeve*, Saravia again stood forth as the opponent who refused to oppose. On the previous day, discussing the Catechism's fifth question, Saravia had said that

[81] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 30–33.
[82] Ibidem, 33–34.

he found it hard to disagree with Coornhert as they both shared the view that the unregenerate could not keep God's commandments. The same performance was repeated with regard to Coornhert's syllogism in the first article of the *Proeve*. Saravia declared his agreement with the major premise, the minor premise, and the conclusion: "All that in truth is not burdensome, but easy to perform, that can indeed also easily be accomplished. The commandments of Christ […] are not burdensome, but light. So it is apparent that this commandment of love is not only not impossible, nor heavy, but can lightly be kept." [83] This, according to Saravia, was entirely in line with the Catechism. [84]

Coornhert was not to be so easily disarmed. Did the 114th question of the Catechism not say that the regenerate could not possibly keep God's commandments perfectly? Saravia now introduced a distinction that took the debate in a decisive direction. With a standard form of *distinguo*,[85] he made a difference between, on the one hand, keeping God's commandments, and on the other, keeping them perfectly. "Thus we say that it is not to be concluded that because the children of God can easily keep the commandment of love, they can therefore keep it perfectly", Saravia stated. In this way Saravia was able to agree completely with Coornhert, without contradicting the Catechism. The Catechism was again presented as untouched by Coornhert's (syllogistic) argumentation.[86]

In following up on Saravia's distinction on the second afternoon of disputation, the two parties struck a question that limited further development of the debate. From that moment on their difference of opinion was a matter of elaboration and detailed refinement, rather than development. As Saravia sought to stay as close as possible to Coornhert's syllogism, which required a further understanding of the term 'perfect', Coornhert sought to show the internal contradictions (the *pugnantia*) of Saravia's arguments. The debate came to focus more and more on the concept 'perfect': what did it mean to keep God's commandments perfectly?

---

[83] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 10. Idem, *Disputatie*, 35–36.
[84] Idem, *Disputatie*, 36.
[85] This type of argument has been considered "the heart of the post-Reformation disputation." See Kenny, Pinborg, "Medieval Philosophical Literature," 27. See pp. 63–64.
[86] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 36.

Improvising masterfully, Saravia was able to lead the disputation into the right channels and to maintain an edge over Coornhert. The latter, for instance, introduced an argument from comparison but then had to abandon it once Saravia began to turn it to his own advantage.[87] Saravia also dodged all the 'new' arguments that Coornhert introduced, by appealing to the principle of *pertinentia*.[88] Nevertheless, Coornhert remained an antagonist to be reckoned with, forcing Saravia to sharpen his own arguments. In reaction to Coornhert's proposition that the minister was happy to settle for only partial obedience to the divine commandments, Saravia introduced another subtle distinction. Human works, he said, remain imperfect in extent, but could in essence be of perfect quality. "So we say that the love of God and of neighbour is perfect, when it has its substantial parts, that is when it is pure and unfeigned", Saravia concluded.[89] On the basis of this *distinguo*, developing the ambivalent meaning of the word 'perfect', Saravia hoped again to temper the controversy with Coornhert. Coornhert, however, was unreceptive and simply let the argument pass.

Little of substance was added during the discussions on the following day, the third day of debate. Mutual irritation was increasing as each of the disputants became more entrenched in their own line of argument. Coornhert was visibly finding it hard to keep to the limits imposed by the format of the debate. The tone of the debate changed drastically when he decided to play to the gallery by presenting matters in a more dramatic light and in a less impersonal style. Saravia was accused of holding that the faithful Christian could love God only "with part of his heart". Where, then, was the other half invested? With Lucifer or Baal? And should not every man know "whether he is in Christ or not"? Coornhert introduced new biblical references to support his argument that God demanded nothing less than perfect service. Saravia patiently waited for the flood of words to subside and tried to force a return to the major premise of Coornhert's syllogism.[90] He also complained to the commissioners of Coornhert's "long reasoning" and had it noted in the minutes that he would reply

[87] Ibidem, 38, 40.

[88] Ibidem, 37–39. Coornhert could also appeal to this principle, for instance [39]: "Amiable Saravia, I heard much from you, and little, indeed nothing, that in the least way serves to refute that which I had said beforehand."

[89] Ibidem, 38: "So segghen wy dat de liefde Godes ende des naasten volmaackt is, wanneer sy haer substaniele deelen heft, dat is wanneer sy louter ende ongheveynst is."

[90] Ibidem, 40–42.

to Coornhert's loquacious speech only at a later stage, when a more suitable moment presented itself. [91] The major premise again became the focus of discussion, but the irritation remained. When Coornhert exclaimed that he saw no need to introduce proofs for "matters that in my eyes are as clear as daylight", Saravia lectured him on "orderly" disputation.[92]

At the last moment, shortly before the gathering was to adjourn, Saravia offered a way out of the debate that looked as though it was getting bogged down in squabbles about pertinence. Coornhert's major premise, as stated in the *Proeve*, was given additional force in The Hague by Coornhert's citation of James 2:10 in its support. This biblical place (in Saravia's words) says that "we should not content ourselves with keeping one, two, three or four of the commandments of God, for whosoever sins against any one of the commandments, will be punished as an offender against the whole law, which requires perfect righteousness."[93] For the regenerate, Saravia saw matters rather differently. They were able "to walk in all of God's commandments," but could not yet do so "perfectly". Saravia now argued for the testing of the text from the epistle of James against the situation of the regenerate: "One would need show a man born again, living in whoredom, murderousness, hatred and envy of his neighbour, or any other sin against the Law of God, of which Paul says, that those doing thus shall not possess the kingdom of God." Was it equally true of them that a single trespass against God's law was an indication of an inability to maintain God's law?[94] Here Saravia opened the search for a reborn but sinful believer. The continuation of the debate would indicate that he could find many such.

After three hard-going days of disputation, during which, furthermore, a number of questions had been postponed for later treatment, the commissioners saw an opportunity to tighten the boundaries of the debate. Their first intervention seemed minor, but quite changed the direction that the disputation was taking. At the opening of the fourth day of debate, Monday, 31 October 1583, the parties were requested to

---

[91] Ibidem, 42.

[92] Ibidem, 42–43.

[93] Ibidem, 43: "wy ons nyet en moeten te vreden houden met die onderhoudinghe van een, twee, drie ofte vier vande gheboden Godts, want soo wie besondight aan een vande gheboden, werdt ghestraft al seen overtreder des gantschen wets, de welcke volmaackte gherechtigheydt vereyscht."

[94] Ibidem.

agree "to shorten this business", immediately followed by a continuation of Saravia's arguments.[95] He had spoken last the previous day, so it was actually now Coornhert's time to respond. The commissioners, however, considered it desirable that Saravia "should proceed in the proof, that the believer or born again are able to keep God's commandments, albeit not perfectly."[96] Saravia was given the opportunity to provide examples from biblical history of the regenerate living according to the commandments of God, but nevertheless committing sins. To the end of the debate Saravia continued to defend this decisive turn in the discussion from theory to (historical) practice.[97] He thought it was not only to his advantage, but also a good opportunity for Coornhert. Instead of complicated arguments in support of his position that the regenerate are capable of keeping God's commandments perfectly, he would now only have to provide a single example!

What were the advantages for Saravia? If he could support his nuancing of Coornhert's syllogism with enough scriptural examples, he would have taken the foundations out from under Coornhert's *Proeve*. The note that *perfect* obedience to God's commandments was impossible, would appear not as a monstrous malformation of true doctrine, but a sober and realistic observation that in no way minimized the significance of rebirth in Christ. Saravia's regenerate did maintain God's Law, just not in a perfect fashion. There could be no question of the Catechism excluding the possibility of human obedience to God, as Coornhert had assumed in his *Proeve*.

The intervention of the commissioners was probably a response to advice from Saravia. The commissioners were keen to ease the progress of the religious disputation in the ministers' favour, having for three days watched the debate branch off in all directions. A question that could be answered from scripture, as Saravia had proposed, provided clarity and broke the deadlock into which the discussions were falling. The commissioners had failed, however, to address the fundamental problem besetting the first days of the disputation: the continual switching of roles between *respondens* and *opponens*. Saravia had begun as opponent and had tried to draw Coornhert into a debate that left him little room for manoeuvre.[98] As respondent, Coornhert

[95] Ibidem, 44.
[96] Ibidem.
[97] See pp. 241–242.
[98] Ibidem, 41, Saravia: "That I would like you to prove the major."

was limited to proving his original proposition, in this case the syllogism from the first article of the *Proeve*. Coornhert had, however, proven hard to restrain. This was partly, no doubt, due to his unaccommodating personality, but it also has to be said that Coornhert did not take liberties that Saravia had not granted.

Saravia's decision to deploy arguments by distinction exposed the uncertain division of parts between the disputants. In his quest for common principles, Saravia expressed as much agreement as possible with Coornhert's arguments. This agreement was always conditional and dependent on accepting nuances that refined the debate and marginalized divisive issues. This aim was furthered by Saravia's *distinguo* arguments, such as his distinction between the meanings of the term 'perfectly'. This type of argument relied on a semantic analysis of the terms central to the debate and was in origin part of a defensive strategy.

That is to say, a *distinguo* would more usually be introduced by the defending party, the *respondens*. In essence the *respondens* was indicating that, on the basis of one particular key term, there might be agreement between the parties. It was a way for the *respondens* to maintain his original position in the face of his opponent's criticism. The *opponens* saw his own words evaporate. It was now—according to the theories of disputation then current—the turn of the opponent to bring some fire back into the discussion. There were two ways of doing this. He could move the point of attack to the—now explicit—alternative meaning of the key term in question. The distinction could, after all, provide a parting of the ways between the disputants. Or he could take it on the chin and renew his attack with completely different arguments.[99]

There is no reason to be surprised at the important role played by arguments from distinction in the religious disputation in The Hague. This type of argumentation was a standard part of Post-Reformation / Neo-Scholastic debate and probably derived from the medieval *ars obligatoria*. This was contained in manuals on logic and presented a systematic overview of rules for disputation. The crux was to get the *opponens* to agree to a proposition that contradicted his own original position, so that his criticism lost its bite. Saravia's methods match this model entirely.

The only conclusion to draw from this is that Saravia was deploying a method of argumentation that forced Coornhert into the posi-

[99] Kenny, Pinborg, "Medieval Philosophical Literature," 26–27.

tion of *opponens*, a role that Coornhert was only too happy to adopt. Coornhert had, after all, been the first to open an attack by bringing out his *Proeve*. By arguing as *respondens* in The Hague while retaining the formal position of *opponens*, Saravia was allowing confusion to arise. The deployment of a *distinguo* would normally have left the other party, the *opponens*, free to seek alternative lines of attack, but Coornhert's formal position as *respondens* meant that he could only react to Saravia's arguments, not introduce new ones. It is small wonder that this lack of clarity made for a debate bogged down in questions of *pertinentia*.

Saravia was unsuccessful in his attempts to convince Coornhert that their differences could be settled by distinguishing different meanings of the term 'perfectly'. Coornhert took the view that Saravia could not maintain his position without falling into self-contradiction. He considered Saravia's line of thought logically untenable. On the second day of the disputation Coornhert even said outright, "You speak *pugnantia* or things that conflict." Saravia's attempt to insulate the Catechism from the conduct of the debate was more successful. This sting was drawn on the first day of disputation. From the first day onwards, the Catechism was out of the line of fire, considerably lessening the disputation's political impact. No longer tethered to a public defence of the Catechism, a foundational text of the Reformed confession, Saravia could take the debate where he wanted it to go.

The extent to which the regenerate could keep God's commandments on earth, was retained as the main question in The Hague. Coornhert's *Proeve* was still on the agenda, that much is clear. But this did Coornhert little good. He felt he had been entrapped into a cleverly directed attempt by Saravia to get out of debating the Catechism. He accused his counterpart of "evasion," which in disputation was a mortal sin. Saravia's attempt to introduce a new question in the second stage of the debate, confirmed Coornhert's worries. The Catechism was no longer a topic for discussion.

Multiplication

In the second stage of the religious disputation in The Hague (Monday 31 October and Tuesday 1 November 1583) the bankruptcy of the debate as an orderly exchange of ideas was fast approaching. [100] On

[100] There was no disputation on Sunday, 30 October 1583.

these fourth and fifth days of discussions, Saravia and Coornhert each spoke on average twice a day. In the first stage of the debate Saravia and Coornhert had each had an opportunity to formulate a response on average six times a day. This slowing of the pace of exchange cost the disputation its liveliness. After two days, the speakers, the commissioners and the audience had all been overcome by a state of despondency. The number of arguments being presented continued to expand, but none of the questions could be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

In the course of these two days the audience must have felt increasingly excluded. The first stage of the debate had been relatively comprehensible, although the disagreements about *pertinentia* had even then clouded, or at least complicated, the exchanges. In the second stage, however, there were continual "multiplications of diverse issues," without the question of pertinence having been settled. Furthermore, where the debate had in the first stage still appealed to the 'laws' of everyday meaning and common-sense logic, from the fourth day onwards the audience was faced with differences of exegetical opinion. An avalanche of biblical texts was poured down on those present, primarily by Saravia.

The religious disputation slowed down, as the rapidly expanding number of arguments obliged the debaters to be ever more circumstantial in their replies. The starting positions of the debate were effectively lost from view, and there was no over-arching structure. Both sides repeatedly called for a return to the detailed consideration of the *Proeve*, but neither Saravia nor Coornhert would abandon the desire for comprehensiveness in their replies. Mutual competition impeded the progress of the talks. "Or grant God, dear Coornhert, that I might pass by this your reply", said Saravia towards the end of the fifth day, "to come to the most principal question and proceed in the treatment of your book. But as you could not pass unanswered what I said before noon, much less can I leave this your reply unanswered." [101] The members of the audience knew that they should be prepared for a new round of centrifugal debate.

On 31 October, Coornhert was the first to speak. The minutes contain the following, remarkable passage:

---

[101] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 53.

> Having, reverend Saravia, assented before the Noble Honourable Lord commissioners here present that to shorten this business between you and me, you should continue with the proof that the believer or regenerate can keep the commandments of God, albeit not perfectly, I look for the same proof from you .[102]

The commissioners left Coornhert no choice: he should pass on the opportunity to speak to Saravia, so that the latter could continue his opposition. At the beginning of this second stage of the debate the minister was still optimistic about the possibility of getting things moving. He had convinced the commissioners that it was necessary to take the debate in a new direction. The commissioners' first intervention thus took place on 30 October. Coornhert was subsequently informed that Saravia would continue the discussions on the basis of scripture alone.[103]

As Saravia's plan of campaign had run aground in the course of the first three days of the disputation, some reconsideration of the direction of the debate was necessary. Saravia had aimed for a minimization, even a neutralization of the controversy, but it was quickly apparent that such an outcome was impossible. Coornhert was not to be diverted from his purpose, and every attempt to build bridges between their positions resulted in a greater gulf—and growing irritation—between the parties. On the fourth day of the discussions, Saravia desired to simplify matters. Biblical history as recounted in the Old and New Testaments could provide him with the support he needed.

Saravia for the time being set aside the theoretical debate concerning the possibility of perfectly keeping God's commandments, to consider a much more 'practical' issue: where could one find in Scripture an example of a perfectly sinless human being? Nowhere, Saravia declared with conviction.[104] He thought that getting this question right would at the same time conclude the controversy concerning the first article

---

[102] Ibidem, 44: "Nadien domine Saravia tot vercortinge van desen handel tusschen u L. ende my, ten overstaan van mijnen E. Eersamen Heeren commissarissen hier tegenwoordelijck bewillight is, dat u L. soude voort varen in't bewijs, dat de gheloovighe ofte herboren de gheboden Godts wel connen onderhouden, hoe wel nyet volcomentlijck, so verwachte ick nu van u L. de selfde bewijsinghe."

[103] Ibidem, 73.

[104] Ibidem, 45. Saravia: "When we turn to see the holiest of men presented to us, we will find that notwithstanding their virtues in that which they did according to the law of God, they sinned nonetheless."

in the *Proeve*. If the Bible gives no examples of a perfect human being, there was no need to debate the human potential for perfection.

To make his position conclusive, Saravia threw another forty biblical passages into the fray. He wished to show from the Bible that it was pointless to debate whether a human person could keep God's commandments perfectly. Throughout Scripture, from beginning to end, Saravia could find none among the regenerate who kept God's law in its entirety. Many examples were taken up. Abraham, for instance, "who is a father to the faithful and to all the regenerate children of God", forced his wife to lie. Even the disciples, who "kept Christ's commands, as our saviour himself attests in clear words", were subject to weaknesses, as the "Gospel story" showed. Here Saravia had in mind Peter's denial, among other events. In brief, Saravia could only conclude that: "From all these texts I think I have proved sufficiently, that the regenerate have kept the commandments of God, that is to say (to avoid all equivocation or doubtfulness), to have done [his will], and yet not to have kept the same perfectly." [105]

Coornhert was far from convinced. Saravia's arguments were, he thought, beside the point. The question was not whether anyone had always kept God's commandments in their entirety, but whether it was at all *possible* to learn to do so. In Coornhert's view, Saravia had not even begun to answer this question. [106] Saravia was not to be moved from his view that the new question was entirely relevant and was a logical continuation of the discussions thus far, a view that Coornhert resolutely rejected.[107] His counter-arguments were powerful enough to force Saravia into a change of course. Saravia, perhaps fearing that failing to answer Coornhert would be seen as a tacit admission of defeat, was unable to keep from being dragged into a debate that ignored his forty passages of scripture. The debate was now caught in a reiteration of the previous day's moves. The disputation was, as it were, going backwards, with Coornhert (only briefly, it must be said) seizing the initiative.

---

[105] Ibidem, 44–47: "Wt alle dese schrifturen denck ic ghenoeghesamentlijck bewesen te hebben, dat de herborene de gheboden Godts hebben volbracht, dat is te segghen (omme alle aequivocatie ofte twijfelachtigheydt te vermijden) ghedaan, ende nochtans de selvige nyet volcomentlijck ghehouden."

[106] Ibidem, 47.

[107] Ibidem, 51.

As in the Leiden disputation, Coornhert knew just when to strike. He summarized the "main issue of our question" for Saravia as: "Whether anyone can keep perfectly this commandment of love, comprised under the fourth question. The Catechism says no: this no is what you are here to prove." [108] It must have been clear to all that the antithesis between the *Proeve* and the Catechism had been restored to centre stage. It also showed that Coornhert remained aware of his formal position as respondent. According to the rules of disputation, a respondent could never be asked to prove his position. The proofs of the opponent were the basis of the disputation. The respondent was allowed only to formulate counterarguments to these proofs. Coornhert stuck to this division of roles and put the burden of proof on Saravia. It is true that in this stage of the debate Coornhert introduced a new syllogism, but he assured Saravia that this was only a reformulation of "my proof rehearsed before", in continuation of the previous day's discussions.[109] Coornhert had successfully circumvented the "new path" that Saravia had introduced as a way out of the debate.

Saravia's response was characteristic. He took the wind out of Coornhert's sails by again loosing distinctions upon his syllogisms. This time the concepts explicated in various senses included that of "sinful works", so that Coornhert's (now clearly ambiguous) argument lost a great deal of its sharpness. [110] Nevertheless, something had changed. Saravia had previously resorted to argument by *distinguo* in order to try to show that he and Coornhert were fundamentally in agreement. Or at least, that any difference was a matter of emphasis and could only be expressed in subtle semantic analyses. In this second stage of the debate Saravia did show that on one understanding of Coornhert's syllogism their positions were not so far apart, but an alternative interpretation certainly did require dissent from Coornhert's position. Although he kept both possibilities open, Saravia was honest enough to admit that the second reading was probably closer to Coornhert's intent.[111]

Saravia indicated in yet another way that he now coming to terms with Coornhert's unconciliatory stance. If controversy could not be avoided, there was nothing for it but to fight it out. In this stage of

[108] Ibidem, 47.
[109] Ibidem, 48.
[110] Ibidem, 49.
[111] Ibidem.

the debate Saravia supported his reasoning with biblical texts, vesting greater authority in his views than he had hitherto done. In the first stage of the debate a number of passages of Scripture had been discussed, but in order to illustrate the syllogisms rather than to support the argument in themselves. Now the course of things had changed. Biblical passages were no longer subordinate to logical reasoning; instead, formal argumentation served to support particular interpretations of Scripture. Saravia wanted to present proof "with reasons and from the text itself " and indicated that the distinction he wished to apply was "not invented from our own heads, but taken from John." [112]

This appeal to the authority of Scripture increased the force of Saravia's arguments, but reduced the room for manoeuvre that he could grant Coornhert. Coornhert, however, was unfazed, and went so far as to cast doubt on Saravia's exegetical abilities. Saravia had groundlessly reasoned "from the particular to the general" and had failed to take account of historical developments, in this case Peter's personal growth.[113] Coornhert was not clutching at straws. He held sound exegesis to be reliant on a series of provisions that made it possible to arrive at valid arguments from Scripture, what he called "*ratiocinationes*" or "*collectien*." These exegetical rules were of incalculable importance. As Coornhert had put it in 1589, "all differences in matters of religion, are for the truth of Sacred Scripture or for its explication; the first is not at issue, so it is for the explication of Sacred Scripture."[114]

In spite of all their exegetical manoeuvres and complex arguments, at the end of the fifth day of discussions Saravia and Coornhert were no closer to one another than they had been at the disputation's beginning. The debate's *status quaestionis* had set out a division that was still entirely intact five days on. Coornhert maintained that "Christ's law of love" was only to be kept perfectly. Those who could not keep it perfectly were keeping God's commandments not in part, but *not at all*. Saravia again and again sought convergence by nuancing the meaning of the term 'perfectly' and declaring it open to more than one

---

[112] Ibidem, 53–54.
[113] Ibidem, 47–48.
[114] Coornhert, *Hert-spieghel*, 28r: "alle gheschille in religions saken, is om die waarheydt vande H. Schrifture ofte van de wtlegginge van dien; om 't eerste is 't niet, 't is dan om de uytlegghinghe van de H. Schrift." At the end of this treatise, Coornhert provides an overview of what he considers the most important exegetical principles.

interpretation. Coornhert firmly discounted these "differences".[115] As a result the debate degenerated into constant repetition. In the 45th article of the protocols, Coornhert explicitly referred to the 20th article in his reply to Saravia. The intervening 25 articles had not brought the disputation a step closer to a conclusion.[116] The commissioners' second intervention came five days later, and a not a moment too soon.

In the rest of the debate Saravia was ever less inclined to make concessions to Coornhert's refusal to bend to the way in which he—with the consent of the commissioners—had sought to bring the controversy to a solution. If Coornhert could not be convinced, there was still the audience. Saravia rated the favour of the populace highly. Given the popular resonance of Coornhert's thought, overtures towards Coornhert were a promising but, as it transpired, unworkable strategy. In the second stage of the debate, Saravia's positions became ever more clearly differentiated from Coornhert's. He had wished to show with biblical exempla that the reborn in Christ, the righteous faithful, were not free of sin. This, he thought, demonstrated that the regenerate were not capable of keeping God's commandments perfectly. Their imperfection should not be understood as an essential disobedience (they served God sincerely and "with whole heart"), but to inescapable limitations.[117] Or, as Saravia put it in his response to Coornhert's last syllogism, the imperfect human love of God should not be seen as an "utterly evil work", but at worst as a "defective" work. "Thus we deny that whosoever does such a sinful work (that is, to speak properly, defectively) does not therein do what God commanded him."[118] In saying this, Saravia was positioning himself diametrically against Coornhert, who maintained that only perfect obedience counted as obedience to God.

How did Saravia's new line of argument make itself apparent? Early in the debate he had stated that "true" love of God consisted not "in words, but in deeds and truth."[119] His attempt to illustrate this defective human love of God in the lives of biblical figures had given his words additional weight. This, after three days of uninspiring exchanges, was

---

[115] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 51.
[116] Ibidem, 53.
[117] Ibidem, 38–39.
[118] Ibidem, 49: "So ontkennen wy dat soo wie sulck een sondelijck wreck doet (dat is, omme eygentlijck te spreken, gebreckelijck) daar inne nyet en doet dat hem van Godt bevolen is."
[119] Ibidem, 38–39.

Saravia's bid to bring the debate from the realm of the abstract to that of the actual. Religious discussion should, he held, always be related to everyday life. It was just this orientation towards the practicalities of "well living" that made Coornhert's writings so attractive. Something that the minutes fail to emphasize is that in the course of the debate Coornhert must have repeatedly intimated that Saravia and those siding with him thought that "the law of God is proposed to us, only to know our sins by it, and not to keep to it." [120] This was Coornhert's way of insinuating that Reformed doctrine gave little incentive for good behaviour. This greatly irritated Saravia, all the more because he had "often" and "sufficiently" indicated that the divine commandments had been revealed to humanity so that they could be followed. [121]

Saravia's pique shows what a sore point this was. Coornhert had given the impression that Saravia's doctrine of inescapable human imperfection deprived the faithful of all motivation to strive for the good. This brought the debate to the issue of human sanctification, as embedded in the theological doctrine of justification. There had been debates across Europe since the late Middle Ages about the extent to which a human person could contribute to their own salvation. The nature of these debates had changed in the course of the sixteenth century. Few would now dispute that the human person was entirely dependent on divine grace for their sanctification. Human merit had been declared anathema. However, the practical implications of human sanctification, in which human activity could hardly be ignored, were still a theological minefield.

In the first and second stages of the religious disputation in The Hague, Saravia and Coornhert only scratched the surface of this underlying issue. In the third stage the question of the possibility of human perfectibility was linked to the doctrine of human justification. Up until that point the question of human perfectibility had been treated in isolation, and it had not been clear that it was just one aspect of a much broader theological debate. Only after the commissioners had intervened in the disputation for a second time, an intervention that radically changed the direction that discussions were to take, were the deepest convictions of both Saravia and Coornhert laid bare.

---

[120] Ibidem, 55.
[121] Ibidem.

Persuasiveness

"The people listened quietly," Coornhert wrote on 10 November 1583.[122] This is the only record we have of the audience's reactions during the debate, as the minutes report only what was said by the speakers. Coornhert's remark is, however, far from disinterested. He linked the silence of the audience to exemplary behaviour on his part ("this I dictated providing supportive argumentation and conclusions") and considered silence to be consent. The unvoiced support of the audience he then contrasted with the dissatisfaction of Saravia, who interrupted him and complained about his demeanour to the commissioners. [123]

Coornhert liked to present himself as a servant of the people, even as their spokesman. Whatever ill treatment he received touched "the people", because Coornhert saw himself as championing the common good. This identification with a (shadowy) constituency became more pronounced in the course of the debate. Thus Coornhert states that the audience shared his indignation at the commissioners' refusal to allow the publication of the minutes of the debate. "The people were amazed at it", he says. [124] Nevertheless, the favour of the populace was not a foregone conclusion in this religious disputation. The role of those present at the debate was passive in the most literal sense. Saravia and Coornhert both hoped to work upon the audience's passions or emotions, in such a way that the public would be moved to accept true Christian doctrine.

In the second half of the sixteenth century there was a gradual shift in rhetoric, in the German-speaking world especially, to give increasing attention to the stage of the *elocutio*, the actual delivery of an oration. Partly under the influence of the 'rhetorization' of the art of dialectic, which particularly emphasized the stages of *inventio* and *dispositio* (finding arguments and arranging them in a structured format), rhetoric became distinctively the art of applied eloquence. How was a speaker to move (*movere*) his hearers? The persuasiveness of the orator lay not only in an intellectual appeal to the auditor. The crux

[122] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 73. There is nothing to indicate to whom Coornhert addressed this letter.
[123] Ibidem.
[124] Ibidem, 72.

was to touch feelings. Ideally, this would cause the listener to manifest a new conviction in his actions. [125]

The audience in The Hague was to be spurred on to a Christian way of life, to good deeds. [126] In the third (and final) stage of the theological debate, Saravia and Coornhert each sought to stir their audience. They deployed colourful imagery and *ad hominem* arguments, and skilfully played upon the sensitive, emotionally charged themes at issue. During the exchanges there was a constant shift in register. The most important keys of debate, defined in rhetoric as *logos, ethos* and *pathos*, were played for all they were worth. At one moment the intellectual register of rational argumentation (*logos*) was dominant, at the next, the other party's integrity (*ethos*) was being called into question, or the audience was being bombarded with words that charmed and moved (*pathos*).[127]

Although the same range of types of argument can also be found in the first and second stages of the disputation, there was clearly a caesura in the transition to the third phase. The intellectual jousting of the first five days had gradually become more difficult for the audience to follow. Saravia had hoped to neutralize Coornhert's attack on Reformed doctrine by showing that there were no grounds for dissension between the parties. When this strategy rebounded harmlessly upon Coornhert's refusal to be the slightest bit accommodating, Saravia decided, on the sixth day of the discussions, to face their substantive differences head-on. This presented the challenge of creating distance from the Coornhert he had sought to conciliate while at the same time, in service of the Reformed cause, claiming for himself those aspects of Coornhert's thought that resonated with the public. In order to turn a powerful conviction into a convincing plea, Saravia brazenly pulled a rhetorical stunt of the sort that had until then been Coornhert's trademark.

On the sixth day of debate there was again a change of direction as a result of intervention by the commissioners. This intervention

---

[125] Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 281–286.

[126] And not only the audience in The Hague, but also the large and anonymous future readership of the minutes of the debate. Saravia mentions these explicitly when, towards the end of the debate, he confidently submits his statements to "the reader's judgement". Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 103.

[127] Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 162–163.

on 2 November initiated the third stage of the disputation. With an interruption of close to four weeks (from Thursday 3 to Monday 28 November) the debate continued until 1 December.

The commissioners' second intervention limited the "freedom" of the debate. The discussions had until then lacked a clear structure. A wide variety of issues had been treated in no particular order, and lines of argument had become entangled. The ramification of arguments also meant that there was nothing to prevent the debate becoming interminable. The commissioners clipped the wings of the disputants by giving Coornhert and Saravia permission each to speak once more. These two final statements would bring the debate to a close. There was also a guarantee of more clarity, now that the debate was to proceed on the basis of a series of concisely formulated theses. The *Proeve* had not of itself produced a single, clear question to be answered. The debate about the first article illustrates how quickly the discussion could spread to different issues.

From Wednesday, 2 November, there was to be no more ranging over the wide fields opened up by the articles of Coornhert's *Proeve*. The commissioners prescribed that Coornhert "most briefly" condense the arguments of his *Proeve* into a series of propositions. In so far as we can tell from the minutes, the intention was that these propositions should each represent one of the articles of the *Proeve*. Each proposition was to be demonstrated exclusively with evidence from the Bible. After Coornhert had delivered his theses and the relevant passages of scripture, it would be Saravia's turn to formulate a refutation to each of the theses in turn, again appealing exclusively to Scripture for support. The religious disputation would then be closed with Coornhert's reply to the refutation, and Saravia's rebuttal of that reply. [128]

The commissioners' measures meant an improvised return to the original instructions issued by the States on 16 September 1583. [129] This commission had prescribed that Coornhert be heard, or rather questioned, on the basis of a series of theses. This interrogation was explicitly linked to the putting into effect of the 1581 proclamation, a reference that made the repressive intention of the 'disputation' in The Hague quite plain. The second instruction to the commissioners, on

[128] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 55.
[129] See pp. 204–205.

2 October 1583, had abandoned this model. [130] From 2 November the structure of the debate reverted to the original instructions.

With the religious disputation in danger of getting bogged down, Saravia, in consultation with the commissioners, must have resolved upon a tighter format. In the polarized debate that was to follow, Saravia kept sight of his original intention. He clearly distanced himself from Coornhert, while at the same time trying to find an inroad into his theology and bridge the doctrinal gap between them. Believers who felt the attraction of Coornhert and his teachings were still to be considered potential congregants. In light of its public status, the Reformed Church had no option but to speak to the cares and preoccupations of such believers in so far as Reformed doctrine allowed.

It was clear to Coornhert that the second intervention favoured the ministers and would mean a very different type of disputation. He registered a strong protest. The commissioners' new measures, Coornhert claimed, would mean the end of meaningful debate: it would become mere "sermonizing", first by Coornhert and then by Saravia.[131] It is remarkable that Coornhert made no mention of Saravia being given the last word. Even though, as respondent, he could expect little better, being explicitly limited to a single response must have bothered Coornhert. He also passed over the exclusion of non-biblical texts in silence, even though this was to his disadvantage. His *Proeve* had, after all, gained rhetorical force thanks to quotations from works by, among others, Calvin. In the debate he would now have to do without the support of these texts.

The most striking thing, however, is that Coornhert did nothing to condemn the activity of the commissioners in a general sense. Their measures limited the already circumscribed freedom of the disputants and forced the outcome into a particular channel. All this was done on the authority of the States. During the Leiden disputation the meddling of the commissioners had brought Coornhert openly to accuse the States of partiality. Looking back on the religious disputation in The Hague, he remarked only that "[when] the commissioners ordained, that I should say all that I had to say at one go, I was against this, saying that the disputation would be changed to sermonizing, but no

[130] See pp. 210–214.

[131] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 73.

one would listen."[132] Because of the series of injunctions the States had placed upon him in the preceding years, Coornhert dared no longer openly criticize the commissioners. He even did something to extenuate their action. Coornhert argued that although he adhered to the commissioners' orders, this was in fact to execute what Saravia had requested of the commissioners. [133] He made Saravia the evil genius, regarding the partiality of the commissioners as a given.

The bias of the commissioners was indeed clear. Their interventions favoured the ministers. On 30 October they allotted Saravia additional time to speak; on 2 November they forced a return to the superseded model of debate outlined in the initial instructions from the States. This presented the threat of the proceedings turning into an interrogation of Coornhert on the basis of a number of clearly circumscribed theses. In light of the involvement of the ministers in drafting the commissioners' brief, it is likely that they also had a hand in these interventions. Given the informal nature of the communication between the ministers and the commissioners, however, it can be no more than a suspicion that the commissioners' interventions were at the direct request of the ministers.

In announcing a changed plan for the discussions the commissioners were not exceeding the powers they had received from the States. Their instructions included leading the disputation into the right tracks. During the preliminaries, Coornhert had received an explicit guarantee that the commissioners were empowered to decide only the formal aspects of the disputation. This, however, suggested greater impartiality than turned out to be possible. To favour a particular format of debate had direct implications for the content of the debate, as the two interventions in The Hague clearly show.

The commissioners justified their interventions in a way that avoided any appearance of partiality. On both occasions, while fundamentally altering the format of the debate, they justified it by the need to keep the discussions short. On 31 October the note sounded was that the commissioners were intervening to "abbreviate this business". [134] On 2 November the commissioners acted on an impression that the "disputation might grow lengthy, and with great loss of time would not

[132] Ibidem.
[133] Ibidem.
[134] Ibidem, 44.

soon be finished."[135] Thus they maintained the screen of impartiality in religious affairs that was so precious to the States.

The commissioners' intervention on the sixth day of the religious disputation noticeably increased the tensions between the disputants. In the morning Coornhert and Saravia, as the commissioners had mandated, each spoke once more to conclude the stage of the debate that had gone before. Coornhert's remarkably blunt words to his counterpart boded no good for the continuation of discussions. He dismissed Saravia's biblical explication as an "obfuscation and confusion" of Scripture that entailed "grave absurdities". Saravia's doctrine was a game with smoke and mirrors. Because Saravia denied the distinction between those weak and those strong in the faith, he denied the faithful any stimulus to grow in faith, "laying little cushions under every elbow and speaking peace where this was no peace." If it were up to Saravia, a believer who sought to serve his Lord "half and lame heartedly", could take things easy. Coornhert even went so far as to brand Reformed doctrine idolatry.[136]

Saravia did not rise to the bait, and made it clear to Coornhert that he had no intention of paying him back with similarly "injurious words". He calmly returned to the position that "infants, youths, and old men, being born of God indifferently, must all equally have this mark of children of God, that they commit no sin." Christ did not, however, require that their faith be perfect. After all, "the least faith is sufficient, being sincere, to obtain from the Lord that which we require in our need."[137]

This short exchange again underlined how little progress had been made in the preceding days of debate. On the basis of different biblical passages and accompanying exegetical commentary, Coornhert and Saravia continued to proclaim the same diametrically opposed views.

It would be a mistake to think that the religious disputation in The Hague ended after the first article of the *Proeve* had been discussed. It was Coornhert who launched this version of events. After the debate he hoped to have it reopened by arguing that it was far from over.

---

[135] Ibidem, 55.
[136] Ibidem, 56.
[137] Ibidem, 57–58.

He deplored "having so weighty a business strand at the threshold, to wit, on the first of 50 or 60 articles."[138] This post hoc reinterpretation has clouded a clear understanding of Coornhert's strategy during the actual course of the debate.

After the commissioners' second intervention, Coornhert was faced with a dilemma. He could accept an exchange in the 'new style', running through the *Proeve* point by point, with no room for extensive argument. The first article of the *Proeve*, for instance, would be reduced to a single syllogism with supporting biblical proofs. Alternatively, Coornhert could fill the time allotted to him by speaking in any way he chose. The public forum offered him a unique chance to present his theological objections to the Reformed before a large live audience. Coornhert decided on a 'great escape' and over the course of a day and a half he presented an extensive statement. In doing so he went far beyond the first article of the *Proeve*.

At the end of the first day Coornhert expected to be forbidden from continuing. To his surprise, the commissioners allowed him to continue presenting his argument the following day. [139] The commissioners may well have been fearful of the effect that silencing Coornhert would have on public opinion. Coornhert maintained that he had not wilfully ignored the provisions the commissioners had laid down to bring the debate to a close, but that there must have been some sort of misunderstanding. The commissioners had, after all, told him that he "should say what I would, to demonstrate the first article of my proof."[140] This was not, however, what the commissioners had had in mind. They had desired Coornhert to present "most briefly […] all that with which he would refute the Catechism." [141] They had set no limit to the number of biblical passages he might cite in support of his arguments, but even Coornhert knew that a speech lasting a day and a half, skimming through the whole debate on human perfectibility, had not been what was meant. His later claim that this "whole argument has touched only on the first article" hardly did justice to the actual course of events in The Hague.[142] Saravia even mentioned that

---

[138] Ibidem, 104.
[139] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 74.
[140] Ibidem, 73.
[141] Ibidem, 55.
[142] Ibidem, 101.

Coornhert went so far as to cite one of his recent pamphlets in support of the myriad arguments in the *Proeve*.[143] Coornhert might try to play the well-behaved disputant, in reality he took the liberty to step away from the order of the debate agreed upon earlier.

Set beside his unpredictable behaviour at the Leiden debate, Coornhert's 'escape' from order in the debate in The Hague is hardly surprising. There are in fact remarkable similarities between the courses of the two disputations. When the commissioners at the earlier event had restricted his freedom of argument, Coornhert also sabotaged the continuation of the discussions. In a flaming denunciation he had presented his most pressing criticism of the Reformed Church. This breached the procedural agreements previously made regarding the disputation. Five years later, as soon as the commissioners at The Hague sought to restrict Coornhert's room for manoeuvre, he took recourse in exactly the same way. It had never been Coornhert's intention on 2 November to comply with the formal changes desired by Saravia and the commissioners. He must have regarded his speech on the sixth and seventh days of the disputation as a closing statement. His primary aim was to present his views to the audience and seek their approval.

To win over his hearers, Coornhert adapted his style of presentation. There was to be no complicated argumentation. The audience was presented with a great chunk of theology, but Coornhert only outlined the main connections. He was not carefully weighing divergent theological interpretations, nor did his argument rely on nuanced exegesis. On the contrary, Coornhert barely appealed to the audience's critical intellect at all. His persuasiveness lay in the simplicity and self-evidence of his message. All Coornhert desired of his hearers was that they be carried along on the stream of biblical passages that he poured out before them.

These texts, described by Coornhert as "clear and naked sentences",[144] supported a case that can best be described as a comprehensive plea for human perfectibility. Coornhert gave his hearers no room to deny the human potential for sinlessness. As in the *Proeve*, he made this concept of perfectibility the necessary precondition for belief in the

---

[143] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 73. The treatise in question was *Vande ware onderdanicheyt des christen* (1581).

[144] Ibidem, 65.

all-powerfulness of God and the redemptive death of Christ. Denial of the one entailed denial of the other. Those who had read the *Proeve* had already had the sensation of being dragged into a compelling case, not least because of the sheer number of the arguments. The audience in The Hague had the opportunity to hear Coornhert push his case summarily. His statement presented his perfectism in isolation from the wider issues of justification, and has to be seen as one-sided. Where in the *Proeve* there was still room for the marginal note that justification also lay within reach of those that died as sinners, at the dispute in The Hague Coornhert seemed to abstract from the believer and his day-to-day struggle with the desire to do good and the urge to do evil.

Although human perfectibility was only presented as *possible*, the assumption was that this postulate functioned in Coornhert's argument as a *sine qua non* for balanced theological reflection and a Christian life, which place not perfectibility but perfection centre stage. Thus Coornhert made the contrast between his views and Saravia's absolute. He reminded his hearers that perfection lay within their grasp. No magical formula was needed, nor "a miraculous power, such as a virgin giving birth." Through God's power man had been granted perfection. God's promises came to fulfilment in human perfection, which Coornhert described as a "tangible" result of Christ's death on the cross. "Whosoever lives perfection (not their own, but Christ's) sins no more, and furthermore perfectly fulfils Christ's commandment of love, who to do so let himself be hung upon the cross. Thus it is also his will that allows and perfects the same in those of his own that believe such to be possible." [145]

In the course of his argument Coornhert left Saravia with ever less room for manoeuvre. In the first instance, Coornhert gave some credit to his plea for a qualitative definition of the concept of 'perfect' as "unfeigned and sincere obedience." [146] He was soon, however, wiping the floor with this view, sneering at Saravia's "defectively perfect or sinful love",[147] which he considered self-contradictory. In his speech,

[145] Ibidem, 66–67: "Wie daar left de rechtvaerdicheyt (nyet sijn eyghen, maar Christi) die en sondicht nyet meer, ende volbrengt mitsdien volcomentlijck dit gebodt Christi van der liefde, die omme ons sulcx te doen warden, sich heft laten hanghen aan den cruyce. So ist dan oock sijn wille, die vermach dat, ende die volbrengt dat selve inden sijnen, sulcx moghelijck gheloovende."

[146] Ibidem, 60.

[147] Ibidem, 51.

Coornhert proclaimed in ever stronger terms that perfection, in his view, lay in a state of absolute sinlessness. He moved further and further from Saravia's position, in which the regenerate might still sin. This radicalization in Coornhert's position increased the rhetorical effect of his speech, but in the longer term weakened his position. For the present, however, he drew as much verbal power as possible from the rich imagery of biblical language.

Coornhert presented Christ's redemptive death as a purification by "the pure blood of the spotless lamb". The salvation of mankind by God's grace was no half-finished rescue attempt. God cleaned human beings "of all impurities and sins, although they be red as scarlet, such that they will be white as white wool." [148] Perfection and purity were one and the same thing. "How then can, with God himself so cleaning, the stain of sin remain?" Coornhert asked his hearers. [149] He took his audience into a world of absolute opposites in which each believer was a part. "Whoever is healed truly, not imaginedly or imputedly, by anointing in the precious blood of Christ, they are no longer ill or diseased, as sin, aye death, is gone from them." [150] The believer had been chosen by God "to be conformed to the image of his son." So that there should be no misunderstanding, Coornhert added: "That cannot be done by half, or imperfectly, for then it were no conformity." [151] The human person could "indeed" keep the Law of God perfectly, because God, "loyal and all-powerful," had commanded it. In this respect, Coornhert referred to God's covenant with Moses, but still boasted that he could draw on "a hundred other" biblical texts of equal weight, should it be necessary. [152]

There were other things at stake in this debate, besides the purity of the human person. Coornhert assured his hearers that the fulfilment of the promise of perfection had to be accepted if the distinction between God and the devil were to be maintained. Coornhert considered it unthinkable that God "should be satisfied with half of the whole man, leaving the other half to Satan." [153] The regenerate could not be otherwise than "pure and perfect", that is, without sin. [154] Otherwise, the dis-

[148] Ibidem, 63.
[149] Ibidem.
[150] Ibidem, 66.
[151] Ibidem, 65.
[152] Ibidem, 64.
[153] Ibidem, 62.
[154] Ibidem, 64.

tinction between God and the devil would fade. Coornhert developed this line of argument to the full and it is hard to imagine that it left his hearers unmoved. It is even harder to imagine that they could offer much resistance to the series of rhetorical questions that Coornhert worked into his speech:

> God is righteous, the devil is unrighteous. What congress [. . .] does righteousness have with unrighteousness? But what is the correspondence between Christ and Belial? No, Christ does not let the devil live or sojourn beside him, much less rule in his kingdom of the faithful souls. There shall be no two kings, but one king [. . .] reigning over all. This is the king Christ God [. . .]. And this is the promised of David as shepherd and prince [. . .] who by his nature can as little suffer a wolf or Satan to be beside him as the light, that he himself is, can the darkness. Would this glorious king share his kingdom, won by his bitter death, with the devil?[155]

In the course of Coornhert's speech, human perfection went from being a theological concept closely related to the omnipotence of God and redemption in Christ, to being central to his understanding of Christianity. Anyone who denied human perfectibility, was de facto abandoning Christian faith. "It were not Christian", Coornhert stated. Almost in passing, Coornhert took up the Heidelberg Catechism again. He cannot have referred to this manual of doctrine ten times in his speech, but the effect, understated as it was, was devastating. The Catechism denied human perfectibility and maintained that "all our best works throughout our lives are infected with sin."[156] For two parts of the day Coornhert had argued the contrary on the basis of sixty-odd places of scripture. By mentioning the Catechism a couple of times in passing, he reformulated the fundamental opposition between Catechism and Sacred Scripture. It was just this antithesis that had made the *Proeve* so rhetorically effective.

---

[155] Ibidem, 62: "Godt is rechtvaerdigh, de duyvel is onrechtvaerdigh. Wat ghemeynschap [. . .] heeft de gherechtigheyt met de ongherechtigheydt? Maer welck is de overeencomste Christi met Belial? Neen, Christus en laat den duyvel neffens hem niet woonen noch blyven, veel minder heerschappen in sijnen rijcke van der ghelovigher zielen. Gheen twee coninghen, maar een coninck salder wesen [. . .] heerschappende over alle. Dits de coninck Christus Godt [. . .]. Ende dit is de beloofde David als een herder ende prince [. . .] die uyt sijnder nature soo luttel een wolf of satan beneven hem magh lijden als 'tlicht, dat hy self is, de duysternisse. Soude dese glorieuse coninck sijn rijck, door sijnen bitteren doodt inghenomen, met den duyvel deelen?".

[156] Ibidem, 64.

In light of his caustic remarks about the Catechism in the past, one might have expected more pyrotechnics from Coornhert on this occasion. In the *Proeve* he had bluntly asserted "that the same Catechism is a human doctrine, is a false doctrine, and is so damaging a doctrine, that all people should guard against it as against a deadly venom for the soul."[157] Set against such searing words as these, Coornhert's criticism of the Catechism in The Hague was considerably more restrained. He only once repeated the accusation that the Catechism proclaimed a "human doctrine".[158] This relative understatement can partly be explained as prudence. With the backing of the States, the Catechism was rapidly gaining ground. "In common schools", as Coornhert put it, teaching the Catechism would soon be obligatory.[159] There were certainly reasons for caution, but Coornhert's reticence was primarily in function of his rhetorical strategy in this final stage of the debate. In the first instance, Coornhert was aiming to demolish the intellectual reputation of the widely respected theologian Saravia.

In his speech, Coornhert no longer seemed to care very much about the Catechism. The attack on the Catechism, as set out in the *Proeve*, still offered the framework of his argument, but this was no longer aimed at overthrowing a "depraved" document. This naturally has to be seen in the context of how the debate had been conducted up to that point, with the Catechism already being pushed to the background by the treatment of a series of points related to human perfectibility. These were questions that Coornhert left untouched in his closing statement. Coornhert took the liberty of bombarding the audience with new arguments taken from his *Proeve*. In doing so he gave an impression of nonchalance, as though the battle had already been fought. The perfectibility of the human person, mentioned in one breath with God's omnipotence and Christ's redeeming death, was treated as self-explanatory. He took the assent of his hearers for granted. Likewise, the contrast between Coornhert's thinking and the Catechism needed no emphasis.

Coornhert even presented his long speech as relatively superfluous, as something made necessary only by Saravia's stubborn refusal to admit he was wrong. At an earlier stage in the debate Coornhert had

---

[157] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 83.
[158] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 63.
[159] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 6.

already complained that Saravia was making him argue things that are "so well known throughout all of Scripture, that proving their existence would be folly." [160] In the final minutes of his speech Coornhert briefly rehearsed the circularity of the debate for the audience. Shortly after the religious disputation had begun, Saravia had assented to the syllogism in the second article of Coornhert's *Proeve*, but then deviated from it "adding the words: but not perfectly." [161] A whole day had been devoted to this point. Towards the end of the second stage of the debate Coornhert had, he claimed, added new proofs "in such a way that you could not refute the same, without contradicting your own words."[162] Even this had failed to win over Saravia and a new round of disputation soon followed. This time there was nothing left that Coornhert could do but to "demonstrate that which bears its proof within itself."[163]

Coornhert wanted to show that theology was not a question of learning, but of common sense. Even a learned theologian such as Saravia could remain blind to the truth. The more fury and effort Coornhert had put into his final statement, the less self-evident his message would have appeared to the audience to whose common sense he was appealing.

According to the minutes, Coornhert rounded off his statement on the morning of Thursday, 3 November.[164] After the noon break, which he spent at the house of his cousin, Councillor Artus van Brederode, Coornhert did not return to the Binnenhof. [165] A rider had brought a letter from two magistrates of Haarlem, neighbours of Coornhert, informing him that his wife was in a critical condition. They had found her in "danger of death" and in their letter they communicated her

---

[160] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 58.
[161] Ibidem, 67.
[162] Ibidem, 67–68.
[163] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 73.
[164] The concluding words, "with which I end these my reasons", indicate a finished speech. Ibidem, 68.
[165] Coornhert and Van Brederode were related through Coornhert's wife's sister. Bonger, *Life and Work*, 17–18; H. F. K. van Nierop, *Van Ridders tot regenten. De Hollandse adel in de zestiende eeuw en de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1990), 158.

last wish to speak to her husband before she died. [166] He immediately forwarded the letter to the councillors of the Supreme Court asking their leave to return to Haarlem. The commissioners despatched their consent by return. Coornhert left for Haarlem the same day. The ministers and the civic deputies also returned home. The discussions were adjourned indefinitely.[167]

An abrupt departure from The Hague was not unwelcome to Coornhert. After all, his long closing statement on 2 and 3 November amounted to the end of proper debate. Rather than a structured exchange of arguments, the debate had become a platform for denouncing the other disputant. Comparisons with the chaotic ending of the 1578 religious disputation in Leiden are unavoidable. Coornhert left The Hague due to circumstances beyond his own control. Still, the timing and disorder of his departure recall events in Leiden. In The Hague, the interruption of the discussions was only afterwards formally recorded, once the parties had come together again. On that occasion the clerks decided to keep things to a brief and businesslike note recording the reason for Coornhert's departure, emphasizing his clear willingness to return to The Hague, and mentioning the decision of the States to reopen the disputation on 28 November. [168]

The minutes suggest an orderly course of events, but this is illusory. On what for the time being had been the last day of the debate, Thursday, 3 November, tensions between Coornhert and Saravia had run high. Both Coornhert and the commissioners doubted that the disputation would be resumed. Coornhert was expecting a "stick through the spokes" (meaning deliberate prevention); the commissioners could not rule out the possibility of new instructions from the States that would bring the matter to a close. [169] A reconstruction of the course of events during and immediately after Coornhert's powerful and provocative closing statement shows that this pessimism was not unfounded. The resumption of the debate in The Hague was now anything but self-evident. Even more important is the fact that, for

---

[166] Coornhert had already made his wife's illness known to the States in a letter written on 15 September 1583. Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 16–17. Neeltje did not in fact pass away until a year later, 6 November 1584, aged 74. Bonger, *Life and Work*, 123.

[167] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 68.

[168] Ibidem.

[169] Van Egmond van der Nieuburgh to Coornhert, 5 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 69; Ibidem, 69; Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 74.

different reasons, neither Coornhert nor the commissioners had much gusto for further disputation. Coornhert had openly reneged on any commitment to the proposed order of the debate; the commissioners, meanwhile, chose to stand aloof. It was again down to the ministers to push forward the disputation.

We can reconstruct the mutual relations between Coornhert, the ministers and the commissioners in this turbulent stage of the disputation on the basis of three of Coornhert's letters. [170] Shortly after leaving The Hague, Coornhert wrote in turn to his trusted friend Van Egmond van der Nieuburgh, commissioner for the debate, to his brother Frans, and to an unnamed friend. The version of events in The Hague that Coornhert provides in these letters is naturally one-sided. Nevertheless, the broad outline is credible and can be tested against the minutes, which have to be regarded as impartial.

Coornhert had—for the time being—had the last word in The Hague. Coornhert was in a triumphant mood after his 'closing plea' in The Hague, just as he had been towards the end of the disputation in Leiden. "They are already underfoot", he said of the ministers. [171] His triumphalism resounds in his notion that, regardless of the further course of the disputation, he had cleared his name in The Hague. "How it is, the Lord (it appears) set me there to be cleansed, and to let the people see and hear that I am not such a raging dog and godless man as the Deformed have defamed me with detraction before the people, who often take against such as these." [172] These words, in the letter to an unnamed friend, were not followed by any urgent demand to reopen the debate. Coornhert was playing with the idea of returning to The Hague after his wife's death, but did not express the thought with any eagerness.[173] In the letter to his brother Frans, written a couple of days earlier, there was not a word of a possible return. [174]

Coornhert regarded the continuation or otherwise of the disputation as a question for the commissioners. With regard to his "coming

---

[170] These letters were added to the posthumously published report of the disputation. Ibidem, 68–74.

[171] Coornhert to Frans Coornhert, 8 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 71.

[172] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 74.

[173] Ibidem.

[174] Coornhert to Frans Coornhert, 8 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 70–71.

again", he wrote to Egmond van der Nieuburgh on the day after leaving The Hague, "I place such in the hands of your excellency, who will find me ready to appear there again at your excellency's request."[175] Coornhert had no idea how long his wife's illness might keep him in Haarlem. He therefore left it to the commissioners to set a new date. "I await the same request whenever it shall please your excellency, even were it tomorrow."[176] Coornhert renounced all initiative, even while declaring that he took the debate very much "to heart". For a man like Coornhert this was a very unusual attitude to take. Coornhert wished to present himself as a man ready to leave his dying wife's bedside out of obedience to the States, even for the sake of a religious disputation where he would have to cover his own expenses.[177]

The minutes record that Coornhert did not return in person in the afternoon to request leave from the commissioners. Returning to Haarlem naturally required despatch, but it is at least remarkable that he requested leave in writing, while himself still within the gates of the city and while being expected in person at the premises of the Supreme Court. Did he thus in effect openly distance himself from the disputation? After all, a continuation of the debate would hardly be to his advantage following his powerful 'closing statement'.

Saravia and the other ministers had a very different idea. Twice they had got the commissioners to intervene in the preceding debate. Coornhert's behaviour required a third intervention. More than three weeks after adjournment, the debate was resumed with a long speech by Saravia. This deviated from the new model of disputation that the commissioners had ordained before Coornhert's closing statement. The intention had been for Coornhert briefly to go through all the articles of his *Proeve* and provide a supporting argument for each. In this light, Saravia's response to Coornhert's speech was premature. What lay behind this new disputational structure?

In his letters to Frans and to an unnamed friend, Coornhert recounted how the tension mounted in The Hague the more his words drove the ministers into a corner. Saravia repeatedly interrupted him and complained of his "lengthiness" and "multitude of texts." The minister must have taken exception to Coornhert's suggestion that

---

[175] Coornhert to Egmond van der Nieuburgh, 4 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 68.
[176] Ibidem.
[177] Ibidem, 68–69.

he had failed to take sufficient account of God's omnipotence. The other ministers felt very strongly that Coornhert had spoken of central Christian doctrines "just as though they denied the same." [178] The fabricated indignation that Coornhert expressed in reaction to this criticism, brought the provocative tone of his performance to new heights:

> Unjustly you accuse me, I said, of lengthiness, who yourself desired, as also the commissioners ordained, that I say all that I had to say at one go, I was against this, saying: that the disputation should be changed to sermonizing, but no one would listen. [As] I do as you desired, and as the commissioners ordained, how can I do wrongly? [179]

Coornhert wilfully misrepresented the commissioners' intention. It is true that they had instructed Coornhert to go through all the articles of his *Proeve* in one go and provide them with scriptural support. Their intention had been to expedite matters and bring the debate to the point. This was at odds with Coornhert's determination to make full use of the rhetorical potential that the debate offered. His far-ranging speech on the first article of the *Proeve* has to be seen as an attempt to turn the debate to his own ends. He proved successful in doing so, seizing directorial control from the commissioners.

After the end of his long statement, Coornhert thought himself the lord and master of the debate. The ministers' criticism of his prolixity he could easily dismiss as an attempt to silence him. The commissioners had not set any prior limits to the number of arguments that could be brought in support. Coornhert, who now seemed to be dictating the course of the debate, turned the tables and decried the machinations of the ministers: "And you will not lay down the law to me concerning how many texts I shall use." [180] A quick glance at the *Proeve*, in which each article is provided with *concise* argumentation, makes plain that Coornhert was playing the system.

The clash between Coornhert and Saravia led the commissioners to hold an emergency consultation on the morning of 3 November.

---

[178] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Ibidem, 73–74.

[179] Ibidem, 73: "T'onrecht beclaaghdy my, seyde ick, van lanckheyt, die self begheert hebt, oock hebben 't de commissarisen gheordonneert, dat ick al 'tgheen ick wilde doude aan een spreken, ick was daar teghen, segghende: dat de disputatie veranderen soude in een predicatie, men wildes doe nyet hooren, ick doe dat ghy begeerde. Ende dat de commissarissen ordonneerden, magh ick daar aan misdoen?"

[180] Ibidem, 74.

The progress of the debate was uncertain. Nevertheless, the commissioners decided not to intervene, nor to place further limitations on Coornhert's chosen style of argumentation. Coornhert himself had expected that morning to be prohibited from speaking further. [181] It is not unimaginable that the commissioners reprimanded him, although if so Coornhert fails to mention the fact in his letters. However, the fact that he spoke for hours more that morning in the same fashion as on the previous day, with no intervention by the commissioners, makes clear that those presiding were sticking to their role as impartial 'guardians' of the debate. This came from their conviction that only a debate that was perceived to be fair could have an outcome that would indisputably buttress the position of the Reformed Church.

At the same time, the reticence of the commissioners can be explained from the way in which Coornhert laid hold of the debate. He sowed confusion by beginning his statement with an idiosyncratic explication of the measures that the commissioners had taken. Any attempt by the commissioners to appeal to these measures would now have to controvert Coornhert's interpretation of them. Coornhert's assertion that he had only touched on the first article of the *Proeve* in his statement, was not to be without its consequences. According to the new provisions made by the commissioners, it was still Coornhert's turn to speak. The other articles still had to be gone through before Saravia could take the floor. Confusion must have been complete when, towards the end of the morning, Coornhert brought his statement to an end, after having presented arguments that clearly went far further than just the first point of the *Proeve*. Formally, though, the continuation of the debate depended entirely upon him. He could not have wished for a stronger position.

Coornhert's letters do not reveal how he himself thought discussions would proceed, when the time came for the break during which he received news of his wife's critical condition. The hectic state described in Coornhert's letters suggests an impasse. Although he had clearly finished speaking and had concluded his remarks with a scathing recapitulation of the debate, it was hard to see how Saravia could begin his rebuttal. The ministers felt obliged to submit a special request to the commissioners, according to Coornhert, "desiring the time to answer

[181] Ibidem.

all my speaking."[182] The ministers did not want to wait for Coornhert to do even more damage in a new speech.

Saravia and his colleagues posed the commissioners with a dilemma. If they were to accede to the ministers' request, they would be giving up any immediate hopes for a tightly organized debate. The intention had been for Coornhert first to go through all the points in the *Proeve* systematically. Rejecting the request, however, would give Coornhert a new opportunity to proclaim his views unhindered by any agreement with the commissioners. Coornhert would have liked to see the ministers granted an opportunity to answer him directly.[183] The commissioners asked the ministers how much time they would need for a response. According to Coornhert, Saravia and his companions failed to answer. "They did not yet know," he scornfully reported in his letters.[184]

Coornhert's departure suspended the confusion. Unrest about the religious disputation remained, however. Coornhert informed his brother Frans that the ministers were continuing to slander him: "Nor are the reformed ashamed to invent I know not what."[185] As after the debate in Leiden, it is likely that the ministers implied that Coornhert was lucky to have left before he could be answered. This perception cannot have been helped by the timing of his departure, immediately after having defied the limitations set by the commissioners, in order to deliver a powerful and complete speech setting out his views.

We cannot know how justified Coornhert was in accusing the ministers of slander. Nor can we reconstruct just how the decision was taken to reopen the disputation. Coornhert was informed of the decision on 15 November. In a short communication from the Supreme Court he was summoned to take up residence in an inn in The Hague on Sunday, 27 November. The following morning the debate was resumed. Coornhert was informed that the civic deputies had also received a summons.[186] The ministers appear not to have done. This indicates that the resumption of the religious disputation must have

---

[182] Ibidem.

[183] This again indicates that his speech was a rounded whole and should not be taken as an explication just of the first article in the Proeve.

[184] Coornhert to an anonymous friend, 10 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 74.

[185] Coornhert to Frans Coornhert, 8 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 71.

[186] The Supreme Court to Coornhert, 15 November 1583, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 74.

been decided on in consultation with them. This would not have surprised Coornhert. He could look back with satisfaction on a successful performance in The Hague. The ministers, in contrast, still had a long way to go.

The commissioners wished to continue the disputation "fittingly, without remaining thus unfinished."[187] But if one thing should have been clear to them from the preceding debate, it was that a religious disputation had no self-organizing principle inherent to it. Time and again the commissioners had been obliged to adapt their plans. Each time this appears to have been at the insistence of the ministers and in a manner suggested by Saravia, but the need for adaptation was a result of the difficult progress of the debate itself. The crisis after the end of Coornhert's speech again forced the commissioners to intervene, despite their distaste for active involvement in the debate. Now they were again obliging the ministers.

In a second letter to his brother Frans, Coornhert reports the discussions preceding the resumption of the disputation.[188] He refers to this consultation with the full company of commissioners behind closed doors as a "closet play." There was much to gain, but also much to lose. Both parties were playing for high stakes, and the conflict between Coornhert and the ministers soon flared up. The latter already appeared to have received assurances that they could speak first. Saravia had already prepared his extensive reply to Coornhert's speech. Nevertheless, the minister was still worried. Coornhert was expecting to respond to the reply, and might seize this as another opportunity to play to the gallery. Saravia presented his concerns to the commissioners in the guise of a practical problem. He was worried that there was no telling when the religious disputation might end if Coornhert were to present a lengthy response, and the ministers an equally detailed rebuttal of the response. The commissioners proposed that for every "matter" that Saravia addressed, Coornhert should be allowed to respond with only one argument. Coornhert had suspected all along that the ministers were hand in glove with the commissioners, and his reaction to this confirmation of his suspicions was furious. "So I am muzzled!" he shouted at the commissioners.[189] The old reproach, an echo from Leiden, now sounded in The Hague.

---

[187] Ibidem.

[188] Coornhert to Frans Coornhert, [2 December 1583], in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 102–103.

[189] Ibidem, 102.

The co-operation between the commissioners and the ministers can be seen as a conscious strategy against Coornhert. It arose from a shared concern that the religious disputation be brought to an end. A formal conclusion was to be reached, accepted as such by all parties. The outcome of the disputation would only serve the interests of the ministers and the States if the legitimacy of the public Church could be presented as uncontested. This meant that each party must be heard, and have the opportunity to respond to one another's criticisms. To settle the controversy between Coornhert and the ministers, this four-part debate would have to cover the whole *Proeve*. Neither the ministers nor the States could be satisfied with less than this if they were to attain the goal of presenting the public church as the universal Christian church.

With Coornhert now openly speaking of the "hundred arguments" he still held in reserve against the ministers' forthcoming response, the end of the disputation seemed further away than ever. In a final attempt to save the debate, the commissioners made one last alteration to the format of the exchanges. They proposed simply having Coornhert and Saravia speak once on each of the articles of the *Proeve*. The reply and the rebuttal could then be read out at a future date. This would keep the debate within limits. Coornhert again protested, for "who will stay waiting in The Hague six or eight days, to hear a reply or a rebuttal?" He feared that the disputation would peter out before it was concluded. Only if the full record of the debate were to be published would Coornhert agree to the latest plan. The commissioners then referred to their instructions from the States, which gave them no authority to order publication. Coornhert's response that Orange was in Delft and the States in The Hague could not change their minds.[190]

With a speedy end to the religious disputation receding from view, the ministers staked everything on Saravia's speech in reply to Coornhert. Whether the debate would continue after this speech was still an open question, given Coornhert's recalcitrance towards the commissioners and his unwillingness to help despatch the discussions. Saravia's initial intention in the disputation had been to damp down the uproar about the *Proeve* by finding common ground with Coornhert. In the course of the debate he had had to abandon this aim. The commissioners' second intervention had imposed a structure that emphasized the incompatibility of views. Coornhert's polarizing

[190] Ibidem, 102–103.

final statement revealed any notion of a modus vivendi between the parties to be illusory. After Coornhert's performance Saravia was left with only one option to capture him with arguments that rose above party disputes. He would try to confirm the universal applicability of Reformed doctrine by presenting his theological views in a 'Coornhertian' mode.

From Monday, 28 November, Saravia held the floor for four days without interruption. His lengthy statement was divided into numerous parts. Saravia flung a number of Coornhert's accusations back at him and deployed familiar methods such as branding Coornhert an amateur theologian. His greatest rhetorical success was the way in which he unmasked the lack of balance in Coornhert's closing statement and appropriated it for his own ends.

In his speech Saravia presented himself as the learned theologian, a status from which he derived considerable authority. Coornhert had dragged in dozens of biblical passages to support his argument. Saravia surpassed him with ease. A good 120 places of scripture were paraded before the audience in the course of his statement. He continually made implicit reference to his academic credentials. Time and again he referred condescendingly to the quality of Coornhert's exegesis and of his formal argumentation in general. He referred to his arguments as "blue" (inconsequential). They were barely worth refuting. Saravia set small store by Coornhert's biblical commentary. "Therefore these are no more than blue glosses that you invent out of your own head to give to Our Lord's clear words a strange sense, which as far as we can tell no writer has ever interpreted in such a fashion as you do here."[191]

Saravia went on to suggest that Coornhert was insufficiently aware of the basic principles of biblical exegesis and paid insufficient attention to the quality of the bible translations he cited. Saravia objected to Coornhert's criticism that he had only adverted to a single biblical place to prove one of his theses. Coornhert had tried "to challenge the authority of this text, as though that is of more authority, which is found in more places, while nonetheless a clear saying, found only once in sacred scripture, is to be held as binding as others, recounted more than once." [192] In the same schoolmasterly tone Saravia also, the same day, called Coornhert's command of Latin into question.

[191] Ibidem, 82.
[192] Ibidem, 87.

Translating cold from a Latin New Testament, he had made a mistake in turning a passage from Paul into Dutch. [193]

Saravia insisted on correcting a number of Coornhert's translations, even when they made no real difference to the point in question. Far from disguising his arrogance, his show of making allowances for Coornhert's lack of learning can only have come across as condescending. "Not questioning your translation, which we will pass over here, we will examine only that which you attempt to conclude from this passage," said Saravia, doing his best to impress upon the audience that Coornhert could barely be taken seriously as a theological interlocutor.[194] Saravia did not shrink from *ad hominem* attacks. He even alluded to Coornhert's own progress towards perfection. To show that praying for the ability to obey perfectly in no way implied that one actually expected to be able to obey perfectly in this life, as Coornhert had claimed, Saravia suggested that Coornhert should consult his own case. "And you too, being now an old man, and having long had knowledge of God according to your own opinion, have doubtless prayed long and yet, as we think, have not yet attained perfection." [195]

It must have escaped the notice of many just how vulnerable Coornhert had made himself in The Hague, presenting a one-dimensional picture of human perfectibility. His perfectism had developed from a doctrine of God as a necessary precondition to recognizing God's omnipotence. Soteriological considerations had only played a part in Coornhert's argument in so far as Christ's redemptive death was related to human perfectibility. According to Coornhert, qualifying perfectibility as impossible would be to underestimate the sanctifying power of the crucifixion. The central position given to this "point of doctrine", human perfectibility, entailed the risk that human life would be seen only in the perspective of whether or not it was perfect. Coornhert recognized this danger and made a clear distinction between perfectibility and actual perfection. His claims only concerned the possibility of perfection, and he dismissed Saravia's suggestion that they look for examples of perfect believers as beside the point. Coornhert could not, however, prevent his doctrine of salvation from being

---

[193] Ibidem, 94. Saravia mentions that Coornhert was using a Latin New Testament, but gives no indication of what edition it might have been. For his uncompleted *Loci communes* Coornhert used a 1566 Plantin edition of the Vulgate. Fleurkens, *Stichtelijke lust*, 387–388.

[194] Ibidem, 100.

[195] Ibidem, 84.

distorted. The perfect human person, although no more than a logical abstraction, had ousted the flesh and blood believer.

Saravia unerringly homed in on this 'blind spot' in Coornhert's rhetorical strategy. In the debate concerning the fifth question of the Catechism, he led Coornhert into statements that went further than his principles dictated. Where Saravia held that those born again could obey God's commandments without doing so perfectly, Coornhert was forced into alleging that God's commandments could be kept only perfectly or not at all. This enabled Coornhert to stave off Saravia's mollifications, and maintain a distinct position in the debate, but it gave every appearance of excluding any middle ground between utter depravity and complete impeccability. Coornhert had already made perfect obedience the norm in his *Proeve*, but there he insisted on crucial distinctions regarding the practicalities of human sanctification. For the duration of one article Coornhert had both feet firmly on the ground.

In the introduction to the second article of the *Proeve* he distinguished between perfection in essence and perfection in degree. When a believer died before having attained a state of perfection, his salvation was not imperilled. "As where there is true love of God in the believer, however small it be, if that person should die, they are as perfectly a child of God and saved, as any man in Christ." [196] Christ could therefore be served in a less than perfect manner. The believer was, in Coornhert's view, in the first place a human being struggling with sin; a human person who has attained perfection is not to be met with in his writings. Human perfectibility was a promise for the future. In the present time Coornhert took account of concupiscent humanity in all its imperfections. This dimension of Coornhert's doctrine of salvation was also prominent in treatises such as *Vande wedergheboorte* (On rebirth) and *Vande onderdanicheyt der christen* (On Christian submission), but in The Hague it was lost from view.[197]

Coornhert's perfectism was derived from his views on justification and was part of a well-rounded soteriology. As soon as this perfectism came to be defined in the debate exclusively in terms of divine omnipotence, Coornhert was in effect caricaturing his own views for

---

[196] Coornhert, *Proeve*, 11. Saravia refers to this passage. Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 92.
[197] Coornhert, *Vande wedergheboorte*; Idem, *Vande ware onderdanicheyt der christen*.

the sake of rhetorical impact. The faithful Christian concerned about his own sinfulness was left out in the cold. He was irrelevant to a debate in which human perfectibility was an aspect of divine omnipotence. Before his provocative speech, a veritable round dance around perfectism, he had stressed the need to distinguish between those who were children "in Christ" and those who were men. The latter approached very closely to perfection. Only with reference to this category of believers could Coornhert maintain his line of argument against Saravia, both at an exegetical level and more broadly. A breach seemed to have been struck in Coornhert's theology, which had always been fixated on the sinful human person yearning for the good. Saravia showed his mastery of the debate by filling this gap himself.

Saravia emphatically announced to Coornhert that Christ's saving death had been of universal significance. Believers who were still imperfect could nevertheless claim to have been saved in Christ. Saravia maintained that these imperfect believers might have their weaknesses, but lived according to God's commandments notwithstanding.[198] Saravia wanted to be absolutely clear that the turn from a life "after the flesh" to a life "after the spirit" was not without setbacks. It was a difficult process and Coornhert's absolute distinction between perfect and imperfect, regenerate and unregenerate, did no justice to its complexity.[199]

In his speech, Coornhert had related Saravia's plea for "sinful" (as opposed to perfect) maintenance of God's commandments to Reformed doctrine on imputed righteousness. According to this teaching, a person could be both sinful and justified. Coornhert had struck back fiercely: "Whosoever is also healed truly, not apparently or imputatively,

---

[198] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 99: "If you would say, that it cannot be said of the imperfect children of God, that they cease to sin, you will also have to say, that they have not yet suffered in the flesh, and furthermore […] that the death and suffering of Christ are in vain for them, at least as long as they do not entirely leave off sinning. Similarly, if you deny that the imperfect and weak live according to the will of God, you will have to admit that they live in accordance with human concupiscence, with the will of the heathens, etc., for the one is set against the other. Now we would have you consider whether it sounds well to say that about those who have converted to Christ, and believe in him, while still having a degree of depravity and weakness in them."

[199] Ibidem, 100: "So it is that all those who walk in the spirit, and not in the flesh, do keep God's commandments constantly in such wise that they never ultimately depart or turn away from them, but nevertheless they often stumble on the track, yea sometimes even fall flat and stand up again, and continue until they shall have come to the end of the course."

by anointing in the precious blood of Christ, they are no longer ill or diseased, as sin, aye death, is gone out of them. Again, whosoever lives in righteousness (not his own, but Christ's) sins no more, and therefore perfectly fulfils Christ's commandment of love."[200] Saravia's expected countermove did not come. His statement contained no explicit defence of the perpetual sinfulness of man, whose only hope of salvation was to have Christ's righteousness imputed to him. Saravia mentioned once that God did not judge human beings according to the "rigour and stringency of the law", but according to "merciful admittance of God's satisfaction in Christ", in whom the human person was held "sanctified and perfect".[201] This aspect of Reformed doctrine could be highly divisive, and where possible Saravia avoided mentioning it.

In Reformed teaching, imputed righteousness was only one part of justification. The believer had righteousness imputed to him, but also underwent an inner renewal. Coornhert delighted in speaking of "attributed or imputative sanctity or purity", wrongfully extending the application of the doctrine of imputed righteousness to the issue of sanctification.[202] Saravia made short work of this. He may well have been grateful to Coornhert for this deliberate conceptual confusion, for it enabled him to dismiss the term "imputative" out of hand. It relieved him of any need to go into the complex problem of the difference between imputed and transformative grace. Coornhert had falsely ascribed to Saravia an "imputative" reading of Colossians 1:22, which speaks of the reconciling death of Christ. [203] "That this speaks of no imputative holiness we admit, and hold it unnecessary that you prove the same", said Saravia. [204]

Saravia emphasized that the imputation of righteousness and the sanctification of the believer were "two boons of Christ". They were, however, closely related. "We add these two [. ..] inseparably in the believer [...], but we deny that this sanctification and the obedience

---

[200] Ibidem, 66.
[201] Ibidem, 91.
[202] Ibidem, 65.
[203] The text of Col. 1:22 is reproduced as follows in the minutes: "Hy heeft u nu sekerlijck versoent in dat lichaem zijns vleesches door den doot, op dat ghy u soudet heyligh, onstraffelijc, ende onbeschuldight voor hem setten." ("He has now securely reconciled you in that body of his flesh through death, to make you holy, unpunishable and unblamed in his sight.").
[204] Ibidem, 95.

that depends upon the same, is in this life perfect in anyone."[205] Saravia did not lose sight of the main theme of the disputation and persevered in his denial of human perfectibility. At the same time he trivialized the issue[206] and he did not hammer hard on the notion that God could treat a believer as perfect even though they were not. This would smack too much of the doctrine of forensic justification. Saravia's speech instead put human sanctification, in all its practicality, front and centre. He described the second boon of Christ in terms that might have been taken directly from one of Coornhert's treatises. It was only now that it became clear how far Coornhert had allowed his polemical urge to carry him away.

Twice Saravia referred back to the second article of the *Proeve*, in which Coornhert had nuanced the concept of perfection. He even cited Coornhert word for word ("to speak with you"). The "word perfect" was applicable to "that which is righteous, [. ..] and that has all its parts, although it has not grown to full size, and in that regard is still imperfect."[207] After being born again, a human person could only be regarded as perfect in this sense: "When a person has received the spirit of rebirth, there not only arises in him a struggle between the flesh and the spirit, but the spirit so rules the flesh, that he subjects and contains it, that it does not do all that it would." [208]

Saravia reminded Coornhert of his remarks upon the "little children in Christ", of whom he had said that they still struggled with sin even though they had already experienced conversion. [209] This, the minister asserted, was at odds with the way in which Coornhert had presented sanctification during his speech in The Hague. "For you are in error, when you think this dying takes place at once and becomes a finished work, since sacred scripture [. ..] demonstrates that it is a continual working in the believer, as long as they live here." [210] The "dying and burial of the old man and the resurrection of the new", in Saravia's words, took place in a number of stages. The believer was given "a daily growth until, by the steps ordained by God, they will finally be

[205] Ibidem, 91.
[206] Saravia reduced the controversy to a difference of opinion concerning the *moment* of perfection, during or after earthly life.
[207] Ibidem, 85–86.
[208] Ibidem, 81.
[209] Ibidem.
[210] Ibidem, 97–98.

granted perfection in the hereafter."[211] To this end the believer was presented with a "complete Law," "to be aimed for."[212] Coornhert must have listened to Saravia with the uncanny sense of hearing his own words spoken.

An Open Ending

In his concluding remarks on Thursday, 1 December 1583, Saravia suggested that Coornhert had carried out a diversionary manoeuvre in the preceding discussions. Coornhert had wilfully exceeded the bearing of the first article of the *Proeve* in order to delay having to address the following articles. The reason for this, Saravia stated, lay in Coornhert's "unreliability in citing some writers". [213] Coornhert had wanted to hold up the progress of the debate, fully aware that the arguments presented in the rest of his *Proeve* were faulty. It is clear that Saravia, who in the mean time had held the floor for almost four full days, wanted to put the blame on Coornhert. It was his inability to stick to the point that had led to an endless broadening of the range of the discussion. The commissioners had for some time been looking for ways to speed up the proceedings. Saravia's closing words must have sounded like a warning. Should Coornhert again be given the floor to formulate his response, the end of the religious disputation would still not be in sight. The commissioners decided to bring the proceedings to a speedy close. As soon as Saravia had finished speaking, they decreed that the disputation was to be concluded in writing. [214]

In a letter to his brother, Frans, Coornhert mentioned that the commissioners had ordered him to send his reply in writing to the clerk of the Supreme Court within a week from the first Sunday following the disputation. The document would then be forwarded to the ministers, so that they could rebut his response. Coornhert's words indicate that Saravia's was not to be the only hand put to the rebuttal. The commissioners had, indeed, addressed their provisions to Cornelisz and

---

[211] Ibidem, 80.
[212] Ibidem, 89.
[213] Ibidem, 101.
[214] Coornhert to Frans Coornhert, 8 November 1583, in Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 103.

Donteclock as well.[215] As soon as the three ministers had completed their text and submitted it to the States, the parties would again be invited to The Hague to read out the response and the rebuttal to the people. On this occasion the texts would be officially added to the protocols of the debate.[216] It is clear that the commissioners wished to have the disputation brought to a speedy end in writing. What is not clear is how they intended to bring the debate about the *Proeve* to a conclusion with this procedure. According to the ministers, the States had "agreed [. . .] that after this rebuttal the book would come out."[217] A return to the *Proeve* was still possible.

Coornhert stuck to the arrangements, delivering his response to Anthonie Geniets, clerk of the Supreme Court, on 9 December 1583.[218] The ministers needed more time. Not until April 1584 did their rebuttal reach the commissioners.[219] The draft of this treatise is dated 9 January 1584, presumably the day that Cornelisz began writing. Things were delayed by the difficult relationship between Saravia and his fellow ministers from Delft, Cornelisz and Donteclock, to the three of whom collectively the States had entrusted the drafting of a written continuation of the disputation. In December Saravia had initially tried to avoid any collaboration. He failed to inform his companions that he had received Coornhert's response from the commissioners and failed to keep his promise to visit them in Delft.[220] The tone of the correspondence between the parties is decidedly cool, from which Nijenhuis deduces that the Coornhert affair had evolved into a 'battle for prestige' among the ministers.[221] Although combating Coornhert was clearly a matter of honour, disagreement about how the rebuttal should be structured was even more important. Saravia wanted to answer Coornhert's response point by point, while Cornelisz and

---

[215] Cornelisz to Saravia, [December 1583], GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636 (transcript by Donteclock).

[216] Ibidem.

[217] *Duplica missa ad D.D. commiss. ad disputationem, in aprili anno 84*, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636, [219].

[218] Copy of the confirmation of receipt by Geniets on behalf of the Supreme Court, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 104.

[219] *Duplica*, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[220] Cornelisz to Saravia, December 1583 (copy), GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[221] Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 89–90.

Donteclock argued for a synopsis, so that the rebuttal could reach more readers more quickly.[222]

In a letter to Cornelisz, Saravia again stated firmly that he would not set his name to a rebuttal offering anything less than "a pertinent answer to all his reasons both in particular and in general."[223] Cornelisz and Donteclock finally dropped their objections. On 9 January 1584 they began writing a rebuttal that would ultimately amount to 100,000 words. Cornelisz undertook most of the writing; Donteclock provided commentary.[224] Only later was the text presented to Saravia for his approval.

Despite the efforts of both Coornhert and the ministers, the religious disputation in The Hague was not resumed. Both parties tried to convince the States that it would be desirable, but the government was not to be moved.

Coornhert interpreted the hold-ups as yet another sign that the ministers were unable to defend their doctrines convincingly. In March he sent a long petition to the Prince of Orange,[225] accusing the ministers of stalling for time, and even of hoping that Coornhert would pass away before the disputation could be concluded.[226] Coornhert also suggested that besides the ministers experiencing "difficulty […] in answering well" there was also the possibility that "some change in the commonwealth's affairs" might impede the resumption of the debate in The Hague.[227] This could have been an allusion to the military victories of the Prince of Parma, which were of considerable concern to the States of Holland. Overall, however, the petition to the Prince gives the impression that Coornhert was particularly thinking of the growing influence of the Reformed Church, a matter of considerable concern to himself.

In the meantime the "government in Holland" had bound itself by oath to allow the public exercise of none but the Reformed religion. Coornhert saw freedom of conscience endangered. The obstructing of the religious disputation in The Hague was, in his eyes, a direct result

---

[222] Cornelisz to Saravia, December 1583 (copy), GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636; Saravia to Cornelisz, 27 December 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 50. For a transcription see Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 274.

[223] Saravia to Cornelisz, 27 December 1583, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 50.

[224] *Duplica*, GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[225] Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 106–108.

[226] Ibidem, 107.

[227] Ibidem.

of this "new policy". Even before their doctrine had been tested in full and open debate, the Reformed ministers were denying public worship to those who dissented from them. Coornhert's petition followed a double track, which did nothing for his credibility. On the one hand he openly criticized the religious policy of the States; on the other he alleged that it was possible to dispute on the basis of scripture "without touching any part of the political government." [228] The Prince must have perceived the impossibility of this claim; there was no question of him responding to Coornhert's request.

Coornhert did not give up easily. In May he even moved to The Hague with his ailing wife, so that he could take care of her while lobbying the States. This manoeuvre proving fruitless, on 19 June 1584 he gave the Supreme Court written notification of his departure from The Hague.[229] He remained available for any continuation of the discussions, but—in view of the great uncertainty of the issue—he asked for his response to be returned to him. Coornhert was apparently unaware that the ministers had already submitted their rebuttal, and that their supposed stalling was no longer a reason for delay. The councillors communicated their rejection of his request by way of their clerk, Geniets. The formal answer to Coornhert's request was that the Supreme Court was not authorized to take any action with regard to the religious disputation in The Hague. The composition of the Court had changed, and furthermore councillors of the Court of Holland, deputies of the States and members of the States had all been involved in the debate. Coornhert was advised to apply to the States. [230] This had for some time no longer been an option for Coornhert, so bad had his relations with the government become. He decided to draw his petition to the attention of the Supreme Court once more, but now the door was closed against him. The secretary of the Court, Waghewijns, refused to take receipt of the letter from Coornhert's notary. He said he had no desire to have anything more to do with the business. [231]

---

[228] Ibidem, 108.

[229] Coornhert to the Supreme Court, 18 June 1583, in: Coornhert, Disputatie, 104–105. Coornhert took the commissioners that were also members of the Supreme Court to be the 'head commissioners' of the disputation.

[230] As reported by I. Evertsz. ter Voort, [June 1584], in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 105–106. Evertsz. ter Voort, possibly one of the notaries present at the disputation, had passed on Coornhert's letter to the secretary of the Supreme Court.

[231] As reported by G. I. Rijswijck, 5 July 1584, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 106. Rijswijck had acted as Coornhert's notary during the disputation. Coornhert asked him to deliver his second and final petition to the Supreme Court.

There is every reason to think that it was not on its own initiative that the Supreme Court was refusing to take Coornhert's petition under consideration. The reasons given have every appearance of excuses. Coornhert must have suspected that the States had now decided against continuing the religious disputation in The Hague. This conclusion seems sound. Neither the ministers nor Coornhert lacked the willingness to resume the discussion. Cornelisz and Donteclock had in the meantime been lobbying a number of members of the Supreme Court to wrap up the religious disputation. They too had addressed a request to the States, with no result. Viewing the mounting threat from the South, where Parma was continuing his campaign of reconquest, a time-consuming, labour-intensive and controversial religious disputation was not something the States could consider desirable. [232]

The cancellation of the religious disputation in The Hague did not bring the Coornhert affair to an end. The ministers and Coornhert himself both faced years more of arguing their cases—primarily on paper. Already in early 1584, during his sojourn in The Hague, Coornhert had begun circulating the treatise *Van de aflaet Jesu Christi*, the so-called "Hague pamphlet".[233] In this piece Coornhert indirectly, by means of a series of dialogues, denounced (among other things) the censorship of books in Holland. The preface indicates that the Coornhert affair was still a hot issue. Coornhert was indignant, for instance, that he was increasingly subject to detraction from the pulpit.

The threat that the ministers of Delft and their colleagues saw in Coornhert's writings continued undiminished. The *Proeve*, for example, was still being widely circulated in 1585. In that year two different treatises by Cornelisz and Donteclock were issued. With their *Wederlegghinghe eens boecxkens ghenaemt Proeve van den Nederlandtschen Catechismo* (Refutation of a booklet named Test of the Dutch Catechism) they returned to the treatise that had set off the religious disputation in The Hague. Their second pamphlet, *Reedenen waeromme dat niemant de gheboden Gods in dit leven volcomelick kan onderhouden* (Reasons why nobody can keep God's commandments

[232] Cornelisz and Donteclock, *Wederlegghinge eens boecxkens, ghenaemt Proeve vanden Nederlantschen Catechismo* (Delft, 1585), 17.
[233] Coornhert, *Van de aflaet Jesu Christi*, in *Wercken* III, 287r–293v.

perfectly in this life),[234] was also a continuation of the religious disputation by other means, focusing on Coornhert's perfectism. Both studies were "visited" by the Delft classis.[235] Saravia now seems to have vanished from the picture. In the preface to the *Wederlegghinghe*, the ministers of Delft indicated that Saravia's duties in Leiden prevented him from giving the matter his further attention. In fact, the Coornhert affair continued to occupy Saravia for some time. In 1590, two years after moving to England, he was asking Cornelisz to send him the notes he had made in preparation for the debate in The Hague.[236]

Coornhert responded in 1585 to the Delft ministers' *Reedenen* with the treatise *Hemelwerck ofte quay toeverlaat*. He circulated this piece in combination with his *Vande ware onderdanicheyt* (1581), which focused on human sanctification. In 1584 Coornhert had already challenged his Reformed opponents to answer this work if they could. Now that it was again easy to get hold of, Cornelisz decided in the course of 1585 that it was high time to get down to a thorough refutation. In December 1585 he presented his work to the classis. The response was mixed. Cornelisz was asked to expand upon and clarify certain points. The classis worried that the "the common man" would find the short piece too "dark".[237] The polemic between Coornhert and the ministers was not taking place in a closed circle of professional theologians and a few interested laymen. On the contrary, the classis felt the accessibility of the controversy had to be maintained so that Coornhert's attractive pamphlets could be countered.[238]

At the end of the disputation in The Hague the competition for the people's favour was still undecided, and the struggle continued

---

[234] Cornelisz and Donteclock, *Reedenen waeromme dat niemant de gheboden Gods in dit leven volcomelick kan onderhouden* (Delft, 1585).

[235] *Classicale acta, 1573–1620*, vol. 7, *Provinciale synode van Zuid-Holland. Classis Delft en Delfland, 1572–1620*, ed. P. H. A. M. Abels and A. Ph. F. Wouters, RGP, kleine ser., no. 93 (The Hague, 2001), 23.

[236] Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 91.

[237] Abels and Wouters, *Classicale acta*, 34–35. The following manuscripts are presumably preliminary studies for this treatise (which does not survive in print): *Of de gheloovighe Mensch tot volcomenheijt mach comen in dit leven* (draft), GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636; *De sanctificatione* (copy), GAD, Hervormde Gem., inv. no. 636.

[238] Jaanus writes entertainingly on the "business" that the ministers were running in publications by Cornelisz and Donteclock against Coornhert. Jaanus, *Hervormd Delft*, 186–187.

on paper until Coornhert's death in 1590. [239] The ministers on their part refrained from any written response. The synod of Gouda (1589) reacted negatively to a remonstrance submitted by Coornhert, stating: "We know this man well, but would have nothing to do with him". [240] Coornhert no longer qualified as a debating partner. He was kindly requested to turn to the States, if he had anything to add to the issues debated in The Hague.

[239] E.g. D. V. Coornhert, *Hemel-werck ofte quay-toe-verlaat van 't volkomen onderhouden ende dadelijck wercken der geboden Godes, niet hier maer hier na (in de hemelsche ruste ende vier-daghen) so eenighe Delfsche predicanten dat leeren in een boecxken ghenaemt Redenen &c*, in *Wercken* II, 341r–376v; Idem, *Vande predestinatie, verkiesinghe, ende verwerpinghe Godes. Ontwarringhe* , in *Wercken* III, 171r–282r; Idem, *Dolingen des Catechismi, anderwerven blijckende in des selfs beproefde proeve (in 't boeck wederlegginghen ende de censuren of berispingen van Arent Cornelisz., Reijnier Donteclock ende Joannes Gerobulus)*, in *Wercken* II, 268r–340v.

[240] Remonstrance by Coornhert submitted to the Synod of Gouda, 27 August 1589, in: Coornhert, *Disputatie*, 112–117. Coornhert made a marginal note of the Synod's dismissive reaction in a copy of the remonstrance, subsequently to be included in a later edition of Coornhert's *Disputatie over den Catechismus van Heydelbergh* (Gouda, 1617).

IN CONCLUSION: AUTHORITY AND ORDER

The "foundations of the Reformed religion" had been laid in the Netherlands under difficult circumstances, and the Reformation remained extremely vulnerable. Furthermore, the Catholic foe would continue the battle for as long as the Christian Reformed Church failed to maintain sufficient unity. This was William of Orange's view of the condition of religion in the Netherlands, as expressed in a letter written to Frederick II of Denmark (1534–1588) on 9 July 1579. [1]

In current historiography, Frederick II is considered a 'Lutheran' ruler, while William—although little can be said with certainty about his personal convictions—is placed among the 'Calvinists'.[2] Such a rigid categorization of the religious relations of the late sixteenth century is, however, anachronistic and goes against the views then current. In his letter to the king of Denmark, the Prince of Orange made a powerful appeal to the importance of Christian unity. In a practical sense, he indicated the need for closed ranks against the common Catholic enemy. More important though, in my view, is the implicit assumption that both men, William and Frederick, served the same religious cause. The Prince saw it as self-evident that the religious troubles of the Low Countries were "well known to all Christendom." [3] It was a struggle of universal significance that transcended any local interest.

It would, of course, be wrong to trivialize the differences between the Protestant reformers. The Prince of Orange complained to Frederick II about the behaviour of German theologians, whose outspoken criticism of their counterparts in the Low Countries did serious damage to the cause of Reformation. The king of Denmark, who also ruled over Schleswig and Holstein, had become closely involved in the dogmatic conflict between 'Gnesio-Lutherans' and their 'Crypto-Calvinist'

---

[1] KHA, Willem I (WI), inv. no. XIV B/8a-4, fos. 1–2. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. J. Smit for this reference.

[2] A. Th. van Deursen, *Willem van Oranje: Een biografisch portret* (Amsterdam, 1995), 60.

[3] KHA, WI, inv. no. XIV B/8a-4, fos. 1, 3–4.

opponents.[4] In the Netherlands, too, this controversy was unsettling, as the Prince indicated in his letter. According to William, the best solution would be to organize a free religious disputation. He asked permission to send a number of theologians to Denmark to carry out preliminary consultations. As yet the time was not ripe for a definitive judgement of theological issues, given that—according to the Prince—neither of the parties held sufficient authority to identify and condemn false churches as such.[5]

Force of circumstances led the Prince of Orange to develop a number of religious truces in this period, but his devotion to the ideal of a universal ecclesial community remained unaltered. This church would naturally have a public character. Unity in religion was generally accepted to be a precondition for lasting peace and unity in the state. Religious truces were only temporary solutions to local problems. In Holland, William maintained a church that he regarded as the guardian of a universal Christianity. As is apparent from his letter to Frederick, the precise identity of this church was still far from fixed. The Prince had no desire to pre-empt developments and saw it as of the utmost importance to create room for debate. As long as Christendom continued to face a crisis of authority, a formal colloquy provided a means towards legitimizing the ruling church's position of power. Also, a disputation of this kind enabled various forms of conflict management that could also serve the cause of unity. The same considerations had weight in the Prince's final consent to the religious disputation in The Hague. William's decision was not guided by a rarified ideal, subsequently to be cruelly thwarted by the recalcitrant realities of religious division. Religious unity may at the time have constituted an ideal, but its pursuit must not therefore be dismissed as unrealistic or utopistic even.

In the late sixteenth century it was far from naive to desire religious unity, and far from utopian to think that a religious disputation would further this cause. The expectation was that a formal debate of this nature would bring theological controversy to an end, strengthen the position of the public church, and thereby serve "towards conserva-

---

[4] Thorkild Lyby and Ole Peter Grell, "The Consolidation of Lutheranism in Denmark and Norway," in *The Scandinavian Reformation from Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform*, ed. Ole Peter Grell (Cambridge, 1995), 120–123.

[5] KHA, WI, inv. no. XIV B/8a-4, fos. 2, 4.

tion of the authority and government of these lands." [6] This was the conviction both of the Prince and of the States of Holland. In light of the innumerable religious disputations that took place in Europe in this period, it was a conviction that many seem to have shared. Religious disputations in other countries were also instruments of a pre-eminently political nature. Nevertheless, it took almost a year, until October 1583, for the Prince and the States to give in to the pressure of the ministers, who had long been demanding a debate. The practical utility of a religious disputation always had to be weighed against the immediate risk of a public assembly, something that even in itself might pose a threat to public order. The unity of the country might in the long term require religious uniformity, but in the short term disturbing the religious *status quo* could do more harm than good.

The disputations in Leiden (1578) and The Hague (1583) took place against the turbulent backdrop of the Dutch Revolt. In the first instance, the wartime situation impeded such meetings even taking place. The authorities could not risk theological debate that might lead to disorder. The controversial writings of Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert, which occasioned both disputations, did nothing to allay such fears. The identities and numbers of his supporters are hard to gauge. That his criticisms of the Reformed Church and its doctrines caused a sensation is certain. The successive 'Coornhert affairs' were of genuine concern to the States. Not only was Coornhert bringing the public church into disrepute, his rejection of the prevailing political-religious order threatened to weaken the common front against the Spanish enemy. Coornhert himself was conscious of the potentially dangerous effects of his criticism, but he continued to write regardless. The church of the Reformed was, in his eyes, so noxious that the faithful had to be warned against it. Furthermore, the debate that he initiated would, he felt sure, ultimately restore and strengthen the country's peace. The triumph of truth would make reconciliation possible.

Exactly the same conviction led the Prince and the States finally to facilitate the religious disputations. 'Reconciliation', as understood by the States, should not be taken too literally. The government hoped primarily that this was a way to silence Coornhert once and for all. The sternness of the States towards Coornhert—in their eyes a dangerous troublemaker—did not correspond to the public displays of

[6] NA, StvH, inv. no. 18, Res. 16 September 1583.

temperateness put on by the ministers. While their letters have plenty to say about the puffed up, deceitful nature of this "uncircumcized Philistine", they took Coornhert very seriously as a partner in debate and threw themselves into the controversy whole-heartedly. During the disputations in Leiden and The Hague there was little sign of overt hostility towards Coornhert. On the contrary, the ministers made every attempt to conciliate him. The States, through a series of prohibitions on publication, had already pushed him to the margins of public life, making it all the more remarkable that the ministers should have taken the position that they did.

The ministers Tilius, Cornelisz, Donteclock and Saravia have to be considered the driving force behind the disputations. As regards this effort, they found the States reluctant, unwilling even, to give much support. The government would rather punish Coornhert (with an express appeal to the requirements of maintaining public order), than openly involve itself in religious debates. Although the censorship proclamation of 1581 did, in coded terms, show the willingness of the States to impede the dissemination of treatises against the Reformed, there was to be no government condemnation of Coornhert's doctrines as such. Partly as a result of this refusal to show any theological favour, the relationship between the government and the public church—natural allies—came under increasing pressure during the period in question (1577–1583).

In the course of 1577 Tilius discovered how strongly William was opposed to religious disputations that could only add to the overheated tensions in the country. The minister nevertheless managed to get a disputation off the ground in Woerden, but at the price of the Prince's favour. Less than a year later, the States put a stop to the religious disputation between the ministers and Coornhert in Delft. Their objection was that their permission had not been sought beforehand. When the ministers applied for leave to continue the debate, thinking that a disputation at Leiden University would prove conclusive, the same States granted permission by return post. This turned out to be a miscalculation: the government found itself forced to take a more active role in the management of the discussions, with all the public-order risks that this entailed. After the lamentable end of the debate, the States resorted to issuing prohibitions against Coornhert by name. He was repeatedly forbidden to publish on religious subjects.

The ease with which the States agreed to the disputation in Leiden in February 1578, stands in stark contrast to the difficult political negoti-

ations preceding the public debate in The Hague in 1583. What might explain the difference? Although the success of the Revolt seemed far from assured in either 1578 or 1583, there had been an important psychological change. In 1578 the ministers of Holland regarded the minority position of their church as a definite drawback.Their power-base, however, seemed to grow as the Revolt spread, for instance with the accession of Amsterdam to the Pacification of Gent that very year. The religious disputation in Leiden was a sign of self-confidence, on the parts of both the States and the Reformed ministers. While Coornhert might be a threat to the expansion of the Reformed Church, the ministers thought he was a danger they could handle. In this matter, the States acted as the political wing of the Reformed Church, seizing on the debate in Leiden as a fit opportunity to legitimize the church's public status.

Five years later circumstances were far less favourable for the Reformed Church, which was swiftly losing territory in the Low Countries as Parma's troops advanced. The defection of Rennenberg, stadholder of Friesland, in 1580 had made it painfully clear that the suspicion that Catholics might not wholeheartedly support the Revolt was well-founded. In the same year the States of Holland proclaimed a series of measures that further limited the freedom of Catholics and tightened censorship. By publishing his *Proeve van de Nederlantsche Catechismo* in 1582, Coornhert made it abundantly clear that he had no intention of bending to the new decrees. The reaction of the States was, however, lacklustre. They passed a resolution calling for an official inquiry into Coornhert's works, but it was never put into effect. In view of the acute threat of war, the States had no interest in doing anything to heighten religious tensions, hoping rather to preserve peace in the country.

The ministers, however, were persistent. In the summer of 1583 they manoeuvred the reluctant States towards a religious disputation by exercising constant pressure. Behind the scenes they will have mobilized their contacts among highly placed regents, but they also addressed a number of petitions to the States directly. These documents made clear that the controversy with Coornhert had changed its nature in the years since 1578. The relationship between the public church and the government had now come to the fore. The measures that the States had taken against Coornhert had remained a dead letter, which the ministers took as an indication of lukewarm support for the public church. In their eyes the States were wasting the gains of

the Revolt and—worse still—failing to appreciate God's favour, manifest in the miraculous salvation of the nation from the claws of Spain and from Catholicism. The ministers wished to show that they could hold their own against Coornhert. All should know that the Reformed Church could justify its claim to be the church universal. They therefore demanded that the States, who now had the responsibility of protecting the true faith, organize a religious disputation.

The assembly of the States would have preferred to have things out with Coornhert behind closed doors, as a step towards implementing the punitive measures provided for in the 1581 'book edict'. The ministers insisted on going further than this, while at the same time Coornhert himself protested at the arrangements for the intended confrontation. He demanded that both parties be provided with a notary, who could take minutes of the sessions. In this way he would have access, day by day, to a current copy of the proceedings. The religious disputation in The Hague was, in the end, organized in much the same way as the debate in Leiden had been. The size and political weight of the ad hoc committee instructed to organize the debate in The Hague was, however, quite different. In Leiden the States had appointed two commissioners; in The Hague there number had risen to twenty, all of them highly respected councillors and regents, with members of the Supreme Court taking the leading roles.

Although at first sight the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague show considerable similarities, both being directed by an ad hoc committee of the States, they were in fact very different. The ministers determined the format of debate, and in The Hague they opted for a different approach than in Leiden. In 1578 they were particularly concerned—continuing their written exchange with Coornhert—to show that their church was the *true* church. By consequence, this would contribute to the justification of the Reformed Church's public status. During the debate in The Hague the ministers addressed the general status of their church as well as their doctrine more directly and more engagingly. This was partly a consequence of the reluctance of the States to get involved in conflict with Coornhert, but also in response to the way in which their opponent had conveyed his theological views since his return from exile to Haarlem in 1577.

After 1578, the prohibitions issued by the States made it impossible, according to the letter of the law, for Coornhert to have his writings against the Reformed Church or against Reformed doctrine printed. The polemic with the ministers continued unabated. It consisted mainly

in an exchange of manuscripts. Coornhert probably also thought he had found a loophole in the orders of the States by writing treatises that did not explicitly attack the Reformed Church, but treated issues of human sanctification in general (with minimal biblical support). The believer was pointed towards the need to open himself to God's grace so that he could be born again. This spiritual renewal or sanctification was entirely dependent on the grace imparted by God, but according to Coornhert this did not mean that the human person had only a passive role in the process. He had to appropriate and 'cash in' the divine grace received. In his plays Coornhert conveyed the same edifying notions. There was considerable interest in his work, for in the period 1578–1583, besides countless treatises, all of Coornhert's plays were reprinted.

Regeneration was, theologically, an aspect of the doctrine of justification. At least, that had been the general view up until the Reformation. Protestant theologians maintained a strict distinction between the justification and the sanctification of the believer. Righteousness was only imputed to the believer, who retained a sinful nature. The process of regeneration began during earthly life, but was in no way related to the righteousness imputed to a human person by God. Coornhert, on the contrary, argued that divine grace was an infused and inherent grace, bearing a direct impact on man's nature. Justification and sanctification were parts of a single process. His opponents among the Reformed held that this opinion led to a doctrine of justification by merit. The recognition of a direct link between the grace of God and the nature of man could easily give rise to the notion (often labelled Pelagian) that the gift of divine grace was somehow dependent on an individual's state of being, enabling the believer to earn grace by his or her own actions.

The debate concerning the doctrine of justification was extremely complex and the shades of opinion within different views were endless. Among the Reformed ministers in Holland some, such as Hortensius, a minister in The Hague, inclined to Coornhert's views. The (Reformed) doctrine of imputed justification was impossible to sell to the people at large, and according to Hortensius it discouraged an active life of virtue. The minister even saw believers "enter the broad road, under the cover of Christ's deserts".[7] The course of life that Coornhert sketched

[7] *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* , ed. Reitsma and Van Veen, II, 254.

for his readers was narrow, but did make it possible to work towards perfection in this life. By this Coornhert meant that the believer could keep God's commandments perfectly. Coornhert's so-called 'perfectism' (an idiosyncratic theological variant) has distracted historians from the more fundamental debate on justification. Coornhert himself added to this effect by making human perfectibility the sharp end of his criticism of Reformed doctrine. In his contested *Proeve* he alleged that human perfectibility could not be reconciled with the Heidelberg Catechism, concluding from this that as a teaching document the catechism lacked biblical warrant.

In light of Coornhert's forthright criticism, it would have been natural for the renowned scholar Saravia, speaking for the Reformed clergy at the religious disputation in The Hague, to launch a counter-attack. This he did not do. During the debate in Leiden the disputants Cornelisz and Donteclock had opted for a format in which positions 'pro' and 'contra' would be diametrically opposed. The *status quaestionis* provided for discussion of the marks of the true and visible church. The ministers aimed to refute all of Coornhert's attacks, and settle the debate in their favour. In Leiden they did their utmost to distance themselves from the views of Coornhert, who shortly before had described their church as a sect. Saravia, on the contrary, sought to establish common ground with Coornhert. In the course of the disputation in The Hague he tried to force him to an accommodation. Saravia used various tactics to this end, but he attained his greatest success by fitting Coornhert's ideas about human regeneration into a Reformed doctrinal framework. To do this, Saravia used a caricature of Coornhert's perfectism.

Saravia's strategy in The Hague confirms the importance of Coornhert's thinking. His ideas were not unique, but as a practised polemicist he knew how to get people thinking, and talking, about his claims. If the Reformed Church wanted broad acknowledgement of the rightfulness of its position as the public church, it had to connect with the religious ideas held by many believers. Saravia did nothing to dilute the doctrine of imputed righteousness (there could be no question of theological compromises), but he did want to make it clear that controversial issues driving apart Coornhert and the Reformed Church could in fact be circumvented. In the heat of battle he showed moderation. Above all, he made full use of the rhetorical opportunities that the religious disputation offered.

In The Hague Saravia stepped forth as the representative of a church striving for unity and seeking to serve the common good. This goal was not unopposed. Reformed ministers were constantly confronted with critics who questioned the legitimacy of their church and its teachings. Many regarded Reformed ministers as novelty mongers, who had broken with the ancient and apostolic traditions of the Catholic Church. A respected minister such as Cornelisz gracefully admitted that in this respect appearances were against the Reformed Church. Its ministers became involved in debates about doctrine wherever local circumstances gave rise to them. This ad hoc approach shows that the ministers did not regard doctrinal debate as an end in itself, but that their first concern was to minister to their congregation. Dogmatic contention always unsettled souls, sowed doubt concerning orthodoxy, and kept believers out of church.

The Reformed ministers went to work carefully. They did not openly attest their assent to the teachings of Calvin or Beza, and did not allow themselves to be drawn into party strife. The art was to remain above the fray. In Leiden, Coornhert failed to get the ministers to nail their colours to the mast. At the Synod of Middelburg in 1581 a number of ministers expressed the wish that a *corpus doctrinae* be made available, to help combat heresies.[8] The wishes of these ministers were not to be fulfilled. The synod preferred to fight heresy as and when occasion arose, each minister acting as he thought fit. In rather vague terms the synod decreed: "that any having the gift thereto should write one or more booklets, the one against one heresy, another against another, or translate booklets already written." [9] Beyond that, any provincial or particular synod or classis was permitted, with the consent of the States, to organize a disputation with Catholics or anapabtists, "should the need and the opportunity be present." [10]

The religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague both arose from just such an emergency. Coornhert's razor-sharp critique, presented in clear Dutch, forced the ministers to (re)affirm the status of their church as the public church—elected and protected by the States. In the course of the sixteenth century, religious disputation, an outgrowth

[8] Van 't Spijker, "De acta van de synode van Middelburg (1581)," 105.
[9] Ibidem.
[10] Ibidem, 104.

of the academic disputation, had developed as a proven means of publicly legitimizing ecclesial reform. Under the aegis of the secular authorities (generally in Swiss and German cities), representatives of the 'old' faith and the 'new' entered into debate with one another on the basis of Scripture, after which the magistrates declared the reformers to be the representatives of the true faith. The outcome of these political disputations was fixed in advance. Although the States of Holland declined to claim authority to settle religious questions, the disputation in Leiden did show many of the characteristics of this type of disputation. Coornhert was to be silenced, and the ministers were given free reign to pick the format they thought would best enable them to bring this about.

The religious disputation in The Hague also bore the stamp of the ministers, who again stepped forth from a position of strength. Saravia, however, worked to bring Coornhert to a settlement. A straightforward rebuttal of his critique would do little to benefit the Reformed Church. Coornhert's ideas about human sanctification met a need that the minister felt the public church should be filling. It is important to underline that the general thrust of the teachings of ministers such as Hortensius and Herberts corresponded with Coornhert's opinions. Saravia's flexibility shaped a debate in The Hague that is most comparable to colloquies in other countries at which a territorial ruler sought to bring different confessional groups to agreement. It is as true of these debates that the public church (in other countries the national or state church) sought to demonstrate its legitimacy by emphasizing the universality of its teachings. A debate on equal terms was impossible.

In a European perspective, the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague hardly stood out. Coornhert initiated a controversy concerning the public church that was injurious to the authority of the States and threatened to undermine the political-religious settlement. The religious disputations in Reformation Europe served to restore peace, which had come to depend on a 'natural' alliance between church and state. Confessional divisions disrupted this order and were a constant worry for those wielding temporal and spiritual power. Coornhert himself regarded ecclesial pluriformity as a problem. He saw it as a temporary phenomenon, one that should be accommodated by a policy of religious forbearance in order to avoid any further shedding of blood for the faith. It is very hard to tell how well founded his fear of a "Genevan inquisition" on Dutch soil might have been. All parties backed the freedom of conscience prescribed by the Union

of Utrecht, which would have made any immediate policy of heresy-hunting impossible to implement. This freedom of conscience was not, however, synonymous with freedom of religion. Coornhert had found this out the hard way, and it was presumably his discovery of the distance between the two that lay behind his rhetorically highly effective accusations against the Reformed Church.

Those historians who take the motivation for the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague to have been the furthering of the cause of freedom of religion as it was understood by Coornhert (often linking this to modern notions of 'toleration') are decidedly mistaken. The aim of the States was precisely to advance religious unity by shutting down, or boxing in, the public church's most voluble critic. The concepts 'unity' and 'concord' were not, however, always interchangeable in this period. The wartime situation set limits to the degree of conformity the States could enforce; the interests of public concord might even be better served by leaving religious disunity well alone. The background to the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague indicates that the States were eminently conscious of the risks attendant upon these debates. The religious disputations did indeed lead to considerable disquiet, and failed to bring the conflict between Coornhert and the ministers to an end.

In 1579 Van der Corput complained of the government's inability to quiet religious turmoil. "There is no head in the polity, and no one to whom the execution of ecclesial affairs is properly entrusted, so that one inconvenience grows upon another." [11] The course of the religious disputations in Leiden and The Hague showed that the States would not publicly decide this theological conflict. This was entirely in line with the Pacification of Ghent and the Union of Utrecht, in which a final settlement of religious questions was postponed. By taking sides in a religious dispute, the government would have alienated substantial groups of the populace from the Revolt. At the same time, the struggle with Spain meant that some response had to be made to attacks upon the public church that was under the protection of the States.

The Coornhert affair put government authority at stake. The Reformed ministers were ultimately granted leave to respond to Coornhert's criticisms publicly. In allowing this, the States, as guardians of the true faith,

[11] Van der Corput to Cornelisz, 7 September 1579, *Brieven*, ser. 3, part 2, ed. Janssen and Van Toorenenbergen, 107–108.

were creating the conditions for the growth of a strong public church. The purpose of the debates in Leiden and The Hague was to legitimize, in adverse conditions, government support for the Reformed Church and its teachings. "In sixteenth-century societies the exercise of power was always persuasive; agreement must be cultivated", states Andrew Pettegree.[12] In other words: disputations by decree were proper affairs of state, in the tumultuous province of Holland as much as anywhere else in Europe.

[12] Andrew Pettegree, "A provincial news community in sixteenth-century Europe," in Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer eds., *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands. Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke* . Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions. History, Culture, Religion, Ideas CXXI (Leiden, 2007), 33–48: 34.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Primary Sources

a. *Archival sources*

Gemeentearchief Delft

Archief Hervormde Gemeente te Delft

Correspondence; incoming and (minutes of) outgoing pieces
inv. no. 43 1577 (January–July)
45 1578
50 1583
636 Pieces relating to the polemic with Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert, 1577–1590
638 Report of the religious disputation between Johannes Saligher and Thomas Tilius in Woerden, 1577
640 List of theses in the religious disputation in Woerden, 1577
651 Notes regarding a book by Danaeus concerning the visible and invisible church, made by Reynier Donteclock, n.d.

Gemeentearchief Leiden

Stadsarchief van Leiden (II), 1574–1816
inv. no. 14 'Aflezingboeken'; register of the announcements read from the steps of the town hall from 24 October 1574 to 4 September 1578
8635 Appendices to the accounts of the master of works, 1578

Koninklijk Huisarchief

Archief Willem I
inv. no. XIV B Correspondence with princes

Nationaal Archief

Archief Hoge Raad
inv. no. 1297 Register of resolutions, ordinances, proclamations, commissions, etc., 1582–1607

Archief Hof van Holland
inv. no. 4593 Incoming and (minutes of) outgoing missives, 1578–1583

Archief Staten van Holland
Printed resolutions of the States of Holland
inv. no. 16 1581
17 1582
18 1583

Archief particuliere synode van Zuid-Holland, (1566), 1579–1816
inv. no. 120 Acts of synodal assemblies (partly authenticated)
657 Pieces concerning the accusations made against Hieronimus Hortensius, minister in The Hague, later at Wassenaar, concerning impurity of doctrine and offensiveness of behaviour, 1581–1583/1591

Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam

Collectie Mennonitica
Ms XXVII A 2312 D. V. Coornhert, *Redene mijnder woorden houdende, dat die roomsche kercke beter sij dan der gereformeerden* (autograph copy)

Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden

Archieven van Senaat en Faculteiten der Leidse Universiteit
inv. no. 280 Codices Actorum Academicorum I, 1575–1581

b. *Printed sources*

i. *Works by Coornhert*

Coornhert, D. V. *Vande toelatinge ende decrete Godts bedenckinghe*. Altena, 1572.
——. *Justificatie des magistraets tot Leyden in Hollant* . Leiden, 1579.
——. *Middel tot mindringhe der secten ende partijschappen staende dese inlantsche oorloghen, tot dat by gemeene eendracht daer in voorsien sal zijn, dienende*. Haarlem, 1581.
——. *Vande ware onderdanicheyt der christen, schriftuerlijcke bewysinghe uit die wille Godes*. [Haarlem], 1581.
——. *Synodus of [weegschaal] tusschen [d'ou]de[ende] niew [vereffende kerk]. Vander conscientien vryheyt*. [Haarlem], 1582.
——. *Proeve vande Nederlantsche catechismo, omme te verstaen of die voort gecomen is wte godlijcke schrift, dan wt het menschelijcke vernuft*. [Haarlem], 1582.
——. *Tafel vander ghelovigen justificatie ofte rechtvaerdichwordinge in Christo Jesu*. Haarlem, 1582.
——, tr. and ed. *Levende-kalck waarmede Dirijck Koornharts zeepe lichtelijck te niet wert gemaackt ende als eenen roock verdwijnt. Geschreven door Lambert Daneus Theologus. […] Vertaalt uyt den latijne in neder-Landts door D. V. Coornhert. Die daer by heeft gestelt een korte antwoorde*. N.p., 1607.
——. *Vande Leydtsche disputatie warachtigh verhael* . [Haarlem], 1583.
——, tr. and ed. *Negentich plaetsen der H. Schriftueren gheestelijck wtgheleydt, ofte gheallegoriseert door Aurelium Augustinum, ende vergadert oock vertaelt tot nut ende stichtinghe van allen gheestelijcke herten* . Gouda, 1585.
——. *Van de erfzonde. Disputatie tusschen de predicanten tot Haarlem, ende D. V. Coornhert*. Gouda, 1610.
——. *Theriakel teghen het venijnighe wroegh-schrift by Arent Cornelisz. ende Reynier Donteclock Delfsche predicanten (die dat noemen Remonstrantie) aan den H. H. Staten van Hollandt*. Gouda, 1610.
——. *Disputatie over den Catechismus van Heydelbergh, openbaerlyck voor den volck ghehouden op't Hof van 's Graven-haghe in Hollandt, anno 1583* . Gouda, 1617.
——. *Proeve van de Heydelbergsche Catechismo, omme te verstaan of die voort gecomen is uyte godlijcke Schrift, dan uyt het menschelijcke vernuft*. Gouda, [1617?].
——. *Wercken, waer van eenige noyt voor desen gedruct zyn* . Amsterdam, 1633.
——. *Hert-spieghel der godlijcker schriftuyren, vertoonende een clare, corte, ende sekere wegh, om in dese werre-tijden de h. Schrift vruchtbaarlijck ende veylighlijck, sonder dolings angst te lesen*. In *Wercken* 1:1r–28v.

——. *Of men waarheyt mach weten* . In *Wercken* 1:78v–80v.
——. *Van de onwetenheyt der menschen, die daer is onschuldigh of schuldigh* . In *Wercken* 1:120r–128v.
——. *Van des menschen natuerlijcke vleesch wondersproock. Verclarende dat het veel misbruyckt wort, maar nemmermeer self en zondight* . In *Wercken* 1:140r–147r.
——. *Vande wedergheboorte. Hoe die gheschiet, ende waar by de mensch mach sekerlijck weten of die in hem is gheschiet of niet* . In *Wercken* 1:177r–184v.
——. *Korte berichtinghe vander ghedachten waarneminghe ende den naasten wegh om te moghen komen tot kennisse van sijns selfs state* . In *Wercken* 1:188v–190v.
——. *Vanden aengheheven dwangh inder conscientien binnen Hollandt. Ghespraecke tusschen D.V.C. N.V.L.* In *Wercken* 1:469r–[472]r.
——. *Ander ende corter bewijs van mijne ghesproken ende qualijck ghenomen woorden, dat de roomsche kerck beter zij dan der gereformeerden* . In *Wercken* 1:484v–486v.
——. *Bedencke vander Nederlanden noodt ende hulpe* . In *Wercken* 1:518r–519v.
——. *Insicht over 'top-rechten van een alghemeyne uyterlijcke Christen kercke* . In *Wercken* 1:554.
——. *Sendt-brief van D. V. Coornhert, met antwoorde van de twee predicanten te Delft daer op, ende replijc van D. V. Coornhert* . In *Wercken* 2:257v–267r.
——. *Dolingen des Catechismi, anderwerven blijckende in des selfs beproefde proeve (in 't boeck wederlegginghen ende de censuren of berispingen van Arent Cornelisz., Reijnier Donteclock ende Joannes Gerobulus)* . In *Wercken* 2:268r–340v.
——. *Hemel-werck ofte quay-toe-verlaat van 't volkomen onderhouden ende dadelijck wercken der geboden Godes, niet hier maer hier na (in de hemelsche ruste ende vier-daghen) so eenighe Delfsche predicanten dat leeren in een boecxken ghenaemt Redenen &c.* In *Wercken* 2:341r–376v.
——. *Van de erf-zonde, schulde, ende straffe. Duplijck van D. V. Coornhert. Opte replijck vande predicanten aen henluyden den 15 Mey 1581 overghelevert* . In *Wercken* 2:407r–450v.
——. *Vande erf-sonde. Of die in de H. Schrifture soo wert bevonden als inden Catechismus en by eenige predicanten geleert wert* . In *Wercken* 2:550v–555v.
——. *Vande vreemde sonde, schulde, straffe nasporinghe. Waer inne naecktelijck werdt ontdeckt de rechte grondt ende oorsake vande schadelijcke doolinghen gheslopen in de leeringhen van de vrye-wille, predestinatie ende justificatie.* In *Wercken* 2:481r–523v.
——. *Zeepe opte vlecken by Lambert Danaeus doctor in theologie tot Leyden ghestroyt op een sendtbrief gedruct achter zeker boecxken daer af het opschrift is: Vande wterlijcke kercke Godes, welcke sendtbrief eertijts is geschreven by D. V. Coornhert* . In *Wercken* 3:50r–57v.
——. *Vande predestinatie, verkiesinghe, ende verwerpinghe Godes. Ontwarringhe.* In *Wercken* 3:171r–282r.
——. *Brieven-boeck. Inhoudende hondert brieven*. Amsterdam, 1626.
——. *Tweede verantwoordinghe eens eenighen sent-briefs* . In *Wercken* 3:323v–323v.
——. *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste*. 1st ed. 1586. Edited by B. Becker. Leiden, 1942. Facsimile reprint, Utrecht, 1982.
——. *Op zoek naar het hoogste goed* . Edited by H. Bonger. Baarn, 1987.

ii. *Other printed sources*

Abels, P. H. A. M., and A. P. F. Wouters, eds. *Classicale acta, 1573–1620.* Vol. 7. *Provinciale synode van Zuid-Holland. Classis Delft en Delfland, 1572–1620*. RGP, Kleine ser. 93. The Hague, 2001.
Antwoorde der dienaren des woordts ende ouderlinghen der kercken van Hollandt, uit den naem derselven onlancks vergadert gheweest zijnde tot Haerlem [. . .] op de remonstrantie by de overicheyt van Leyden . Delft, 1582.
Augustine. *On Christian Teaching* . Translated by R. P. H. Green. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford, 1997.

Bayle, P. *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, vol. 3. 5th ed. 1740. Facsimile reprint, Geneva, 1995.
Becker, B., ed. *Bronnen tot de kennis van het leven en de werken van D. V. Coornhert*. RGP, Kleine ser. 25. The Hague, 1928.
Bor, P. *Nederlantsche oorloghen, beroerten, ende borgerlijcke oneenicheyden*. 6 vols. Leiden, 1621–1634.
——. *Oorsprongk, begin, en vervolgh der Nederlandsche oorlogen, beroerten, en borgerlycke oneenigheden*. 4 vols. Amsterdam, 1679–1684.
Brandt, G. *Historie der reformatie en andere kerkelijke geschiedenissen, in en ontrent de Nederlanden*. 2nd ed. Amsterdam, 1677. Vol. 1.
Calvin, J. *Institutio christianae religionis*. Editions of 1536, 1539–1554 and 1559, in *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, vols. 1–2. CR 29–30. Brunswick, 1863–1864.
Cornelisz, A. C., and R. Donteclock. *Ondersoeck des onghehoorden middels, onlancx versiert ende uitghegheven door D. V. Coornhert*. Delft, 1582.
——. *Remonstrantie aen mijn Heeren de Staten slandts van Hollandt [. . .] in de welcke gheantwoort wordt op eenen brief van Dirck Cornhert aen de voorsz. Staten, ghedruct vooor een boecxken, ghenaemt, Proeve des Nederlandtschen Catechismi*. Delft, 1583.
——. *Reedenen waeromme dat niemant de gheboden Gods in dit leven volcomelick kan onderhouden*. Delft, 1585.
——. *Wederlegghinge eens boecxkens, ghenaemt Proeve vanden Nederlantschen Catechismo*. Delft, 1585.
Denzinger, H., ed. *Enchiridion symbolorum. Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*. 32nd edition. Freiburg, 1963.
Hooft, P. C. *Nederlandsche historien*. 3rd ed. Amsterdam, 1677.
Janssen, H. Q., and J. J. Van Toorenenbergen, eds. *Brieven uit onderscheidene kerkelijke archieven*. WMV, ser. 3. 5 vols. Utrecht, 1873–1885.
Marnix Van Sint-Aldegonde, P. Van. *Marnixi epistulae: De briefwisseling van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde; Een kritische uitgave*, vol. 2, *1577–1578*. Edited by A. Gerlo and R. De Smet. 3 vols. Brussels, 1990–1996.
Molhuysen, P. C., ed. *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche universiteit*, vol. 1, *1574–7 februari 1610*. RGP, Grote ser. 20. The Hague, 1913.
Protocol, dat is: alle handelinge der t'samensprekinghe tot Franckenthal [. . .] gehouden metten genen diemen wederdoopers noemet. Translated from German. N.p., 1571.
Protocol dat is, de gantsche handelinge des ghesprecx ghehouden tot Leeuwarden in Vrieslandt, tusschen Ruardum Acronium dienaer des Godlijcken woords ter eenre, ende Peeter van Ceulen dienaer bij de mennisten ofte wederdooperen ter ander sijden. Franeker, 1597.
Reitsma, J., and S. D. Van Veen, eds. *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden*, vol. 2, *Noord-Holland, 1618–1620, Zuid-Holland, 1574–1592*. Groningen, 1893.
Rutgers, F. L., ed. *Acta van de Nederlandsche synoden der zestiende eeuw*. The Hague, 1899. Facsimile reprint, Dordrecht, 1980.
Unger, J. H. W., ed. "De resolutiën van de Staten van Holland van 1577 en 1578." *BMHG* 14 (1893): 1–68.
Van Ceulen, D. *Het leven van Gerard Amelisz. van Hoogeveen, heere der plaatse van de selve naam, in sijn leven opsiender van de hooge leer-plaatse tot Leiden, en loontrekkend raadsman der selver stede*. Translated from Latin. Leiden, 1687.
Van Schelven, A. A., ed. "Briefwisseling van Thomas Tilius." *BMHG* 55 (1934): 119–175.

2. Secondary Literature

Abels, P. H. A. M. "Spreekbuis voor dissenters: de drukkerij van Jasper Tournay." In *In de stad van die Goude*, 221–262. Delft, 1992.

——. "Tussen gewetensvrijheid en kerkelijke dwang: Religie in Holland." In *Geschiedenis van Holland 1572 tot 1795* , edited by T. De Nijs and E. Beukers, 287–330. Hilversum, 2002.
Angelelli, I. "The Techniques of Disputation in the History of Logic." *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 800–815.
Arnade, Peter, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots. The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt.* New York/London, 2008.
Augustijn, C. *De godsdienstgesprekken tussen rooms-katholieken en protestanten van 1538 tot 1541*. Verhandelingen rakende den natuurlijken en geopenbaarden godsdienst uitgegeven door Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap, n.s. 30. Haarlem, 1967.
——. "Die Ketzerverfolgungen in den Niederlanden van 1520 bis 1545." In *Ketzerverfolgung im 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert* , edited by S. Seidel Menchi, 49–63. Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 51. Wiesbaden, 1992.
——. *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence.* Toronto, 1995.
Backus, I. "Bible," in *OER* 1:152–158.
——. *The Disputations of Baden, 1526 and Berne, 1528: Neutralizing the Early Church.* Studies in Reformed Theology and History 1:1. Princeton NJ, 1993.
Baelde, M. "De Pacificatie van Gent in 1576: Hoop en twijfel in de Nederlanden." *BMGN* 91 (1976): 369–393.
Bainton, R. H. *The Travail of Religious Liberty* . New York, 1958.
Beame, E. M. "The Politiques and the Historians." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 355–379.
Becker, B. "Coornhert: de 16e eeuwse apostel der volmaakbaarheid." *NAKG* 19 (1926): 59–84.
——. "Sébastien Castellion et Thierry Coornhert." In *Studia bibliographica in honorem Herman de la Fontaine Verwey* , edited by J. Van Der Woude, 11–25. Amsterdam, 1966.
Bejczy, I. "*Tolerantia*: a Medieval Concept." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997): 365–384.
Benedict, P. *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* . New Haven, 2002.
Bergsma, W. *Aggaeus van Albada (c. 1525–1587), schwenckfeldiaan, staatsman en strijder voor verdraagzaamheid*. Meppel, 1983.
——. "'Godt alleen mach die ziele dooden': Coornhert en de godsdienstpolitiek." In Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht*, 32–43.
——. "'I shall honestly confess to you the truth': A Learned Frisian Speaks His Mind about Coornhert." *Lias* 22 (1995): 19–27.
——. *Tussen Gideonsbende en publieke kerk: Een studie over het gereformeerd protestantisme in Friesland, 1580–1650*. Hilversum, 1999.
——, and S. Zijlstra, eds. "De lezing 'Mystiek en spiritualisme in de Nederlanden der zestiende eeuw'." *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 26 (2000): 153–176.
Berkvens-Stevelinck, C. "Coornhert, een eigenzinnig theoloog." In Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht* , 18–31.
——, J. Israel and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, eds. *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*. Studies in the History of Christian Thought 76. Leiden, 1997.
Boer, C. *Hofpredikers van Prins Willem van Oranje: Jean Taffin en Pierre Loyseleur de Villiers*. The Hague, 1952.
Bonger, H. *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Studie over een nuchter en vroom Nederlander*. Lochem, 1941.
——. *De motivering van de godsdienstvrijheid bij Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert*. Arnhem, 1954.
——. *Leven en werk van D. V. Coornhert* . Amsterdam, 1978.
——. *De dichter van het Wilhelmus: Een kritische beschouwing* . Amsterdam, 1979.

——. "Prins Willem van Oranje en Coornhert." In Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht*, 44–59.
——, ed. *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht*. Zutphen, 1989.
——, eds. *Weet of rust: Proza van Coornhert*. Amsterdam, 1993.
——, and A.-J. Gelderblom. "Coornhert en Sebastian Franck." *De zeventiende eeuw* 12 (1996): 321–339.
——. *Life and Work of Dirck Volkertszoon Coornhert*. Translated, edited and annotated by G. Voogt. Amsterdam and New York, 2004.
Bonney, R. and D. J. B. Trim eds., *Persecution and Pluralism. Calvinists and Religious Minorities in Early Modern Europe 1550–1700.* Studies in the History of Religious and Political Pluralism 2. Oxford/Bern 2006.
Bossy, J. *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700*. Oxford, 1985.
Bots, H. "De Nederlandse verdraagzaamheid door de eeuwen heen: Mythe of realiteit." *Rekenschap* 45 (1998): 117–128.
Bray, J. S. *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination*. Nieuwkoop, 1975.
Brady, T. A., jr., H. A. Oberman and J. D. Tracy, eds. *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 2, *Visions, Programmes, and Outcomes*. Leiden, 1995.
Bremmer, R. H. "De nationale synode van Middelburg (1581): Politieke achtergronden van kerkelijke besluitvorming." In *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, edited by J. P. Van Dooren, 1–55. Middelburg, 1981.
Broadie, A. *Introduction to Medieval Logic*. Oxford, 1987.
Cameron, E. *The European Reformation*. Oxford, 1991.
Clotz, H. *Eine Hochschule in Holland: Die Universität Leiden im Spannungsfeld van Provinz, Stadt und Kirche, 1575–1619*. Stuttgart, 1998.
Copenhaver, B. P., and C. B. Schmitt. *Renaissance Philosophy*. History of Western Philosophy 3. Oxford, 1992.
De Blécourt, A. S. "De geboorte van den Hoogen Raad van Holland en Zeeland." *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 2 (1920–1921): 428–459.
De Hoop Scheffer, J. G. *Inventaris der archiefstukken berustende bij de vereenigde doopsgezinde gemeente te Amsterdam*, vol. 1, *Archief betreffende de doopsgezinden in 't algemeen*. Amsterdam, 1883.
De Jong, O. J. "Unie en religie." In *De Unie van Utrecht: Wording en werking van een verbond en een verbondsacte*, edited by S. Groenveld and H. L. P. Leeuwenberg, 155–181. The Hague, 1979.
Dekker, E. "Wilsvrijheid volgens Coornhert in het traditie-historische licht van de scholastiek: Een kleine dieptepeiling." *NTT* 45 (1991): 107–119.
De Meij, J. C. A. *De watergeuzen en de Nederlanden, 1568–1572*. Verhandelingen KNAW, n.s., part 77, no. 2. Amsterdam, 1972.
De Ridder-Symoens, H., ed. *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 2, *Universities in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, 1996.
De Rijk, L. M. *Middeleeuwse wijsbegeerte: Traditie en vernieuwing*. Assen and Amsterdam, 1977.
Dingel, I. "Religionsgespräche IV." In *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, edited by Gerhard Müller. Berlin and New York, 1997. 28:654–681.
Dufour, A. "Das Religionsgespräch von Poissy. Hoffnungen der Reformierten und der 'Moyenneurs'." In Müller, *Die Religionsgespräche*, 117–126.
Duke, A. and R. L. Jones. "Towards a Reformed Polity in Holland, 1572–1578." *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 89 (1976): 373–393.
——. "The Ambivalent Face of Calvinism in the Netherlands, 1561–1618." In *International Calvinism, 1541–1715*, edited by M. Prestwick, 109–134. Oxford, 1985.
Evans, G. R. *Getting It Wrong: The Medieval Epistemology of Error*. Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 63. Leiden, 1998.

——. *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* . Cambridge, 1992.
Fatio, O. *Nihil pulchrius ordine: Contribution à l'étude de l'établissement de la discipline ecclésiastique aux Pays-Bas ou Lambert Daneau aux Pays-Bas (1581–1583*). Kerkhistorische bijdragen 2. Leiden, 1971.
Febvre, L. "Une question mal posée. Les origines de la Réforme française et le problème général des causes de la Réforme," *Revue historique* 161 (1929): 1–73.
Fleurkens, A. C. G. "Leren met lust." In Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht*, 80–97.
——. *Stichtelijke lust: De toneelspelen van D. V. Coornhert (1522–1590) als middelen tot het geven van morele instructie* . Hilversum, 1994.
Fresco, M. F. "Coornhert en zijn transformatie van een platonische dialoog." In *Op zoek naar hoger honing? Plato en platonisme in de Nederlandse literatuur* , edited by M. F. Fresco and R. Van Der Paardt, 52–71. Groningen, 1998.
Fruin, R. *Handboek der chronologie voornamelijk van Nederland* . Alphen, 1934.
Fuchs, T. *Konfession und Gespräch: Typologie und Funktion der Religionsgespräche in der Reformationszeit* . Norm und Struktur: Studien zum sozialen Wandel in Mittelalter und frühen Neuzeit 4. Cologne, 1995.
Geurts, P. A. M. *De Nederlandse Opstand in de pamfletten, 1566–1584*. Utrecht, 1978.
Gijswijt-Hofstra, M., ed. *Een schijn van verdraagzaamheid: Afwijking en tolerantie in Nederland van de zestiende eeuw tot heden* . Hilversum, 1989.
Gilly, C. "Das Sprichwort 'Der Gelehrten die Verkehrten' oder der Verrat der Intellektuellen im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung." In *Forme e destinazione del messaggio religioso: Aspetti della propaganda religiosa nel cinquecento* , edited by A. Rotondo, 229–375. Florence, 1991.
Grell, O. P. and B. Scribner ed., *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*. Cambridge, 1996.
Groenveld, S. "Het Mekka der schrijvers? Statencolleges en censuur in de zeventiende-eeuwse Republiek." In *Eer is het lof des deuchts: Opstellen over renaissance en classicisme aangeboden aan dr. Fokke Veenstra* , edited by H. Duits, A. J. Gelderblom and M. B. Smits-Veldt, 225–245. Amsterdam, 1986.
——. "Natie en patria bij zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanders." In Van Sas, *Vaderland*, 55–81.
Guggisberg, H. R. "The Defense of Religious Toleration and Religious Liberty in Early Modern Europe: Arguments, Pressures and Some Consequences." *History of European Ideas* 4 (1983): 35–50.
——. *Sebastian Castellio, 1515–1563: Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz im konfessionellen Zeitalter*. Göttingen, 1997.
——. "Tolerance." In *OER* 4:160–163.
Güldner, G. *Das Toleranz-Problem in den Niederlanden im Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Lübeck, 1968.
Haitsma Mulier, E. O. G. "Coornhert in de geschiedschrijving." In Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht* , 154–170.
——. "Het begrip 'vaderland' in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving van de late zestiende eeuw tot de eerste helft van de achttiende." in Van Sas, *Vaderland*, 163–179.
Hamilton, A. *The Family of Love*. Cambridge, 1981.
——. *The Apocryphal Apocalypse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras (4 Ezra) from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* . Oxford, 1999.
Harline, C. E. *Pamphlets, Printing and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* . Archives internationales d'histoire des idées 116. Dordrecht, 1987.
Harris, J. "The religious position of Abraham Ortelius." In *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* . Intersections Yearbook for Early Modern Studies 3, edited by A.-J. Gelderblom, J.L. De Jong, M. Van Vaeck, 89–137. Leiden, 2004.
Heyting, W. *De Catechismi en confessies in de Nederlandse reformatie tot 1585*. Nieuwkoop, 1989.

Hollerbach, M. *Das Religionsgespräch als Mittel der konfessionellen und politischen Auseinandersetzung im Deutschland des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Europäischen Hochschulschriften, Reihe 3, 165. Frankfurt on Main, 1982.
Hsia, R. P.-C., and H. Van Nierop, eds. *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*. Cambridge, 2002.
Immenkötter, H. "Reichstag und Konzil: Zur Deutung der Religionsgespräche der Augsburger Reichstag 1530." In Müller, *Die Religionsgespräche*, 7–19.
Israel, J. I. *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806*. Oxford, 1995.
——. "The Intellectual Debate about Toleration in the Dutch Republic." In Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. *The Emergence of Tolerance*, 3–36.
Jaanus, H. J. *Hervormd Delft ten tijde van Arent Cornelisz. (1573–1605)*. Amsterdam, 1950.
Janse, W. "De protestantse reformatie in de Nederlanden: Wendingen in de twintigste-eeuwse historiografie." In *Balans van een eeuw: Wendingen in de historiografie van het christendom 1901–2001*, edited by J. de Mooij and I. Smit, 33–49. Heerenveen, 2002.
Jardine, L. "Humanistic Logic." In *CHRP*, 173–198.
Kaplan, B. J. *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in Utrecht, 1578–1620*. Oxford, 1995.
——. "Dutch Particularism and the Calvinist Quest for 'holy uniformity'." *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 82 (1991): 239–255.
——. "'Remnants of the Papal Yoke': Apathy and Opposition in the Dutch Reformation", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 653–669.
——."'Dutch' Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision." In Hsia and Van Nierop, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*, 8–26.
——. *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe.* Cambridge MA, 2007.
Kenny, A., and J. Pinborg. "Medieval Philosophical Literature." In *CHLMP*, 11–44.
Knevel, P. *Het Haagse bureau: 17de-eeuwse ambtenaren tussen staatsbelang en eigenbelang*. Amsterdam, 2001.
Kolakowski, L. *Chrétiens sans église: La conscience religieuse et le lieu confessionnel au xvii^e^ siècle*. 2nd ed. Paris, 1987.
——. *God Owes Us Nothing. A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism*. Chicago, 1995.
Koppenol, J. "The early reception of Montaigne in Holland: Van Hout, Coornhert and Spiegel." In: P. J. Smith and K. A. E. Enenkel, *Montaigne and the Low Countries (1580–1700)*, 141–172. Leiden/Boston, 2007.
Kooi, C. *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620*. Leiden, 2000.
Koopmans, J. W. *De Staten van Holland en de Opstand: De ontwikkeling van hun functies en organisatie in de periode 1544–1588*. The Hague, 1990.
Kossmann, E. H. "Tolerantie toen en nu." In*Politieke theorie en geschiedenis: Verspreide opstellen en voordrachten*, 45–58. Amsterdam, 1987.
——. Freedom in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought and Practice." In *The Anglo-Dutch Moment*, edited by J. I. Israel, 281–298. Cambridge, 1991.
——. "Het probleem van de vrijheid in de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse Republiek." In *Vergankelijkheid en continuïteit: Opstellen over geschiedenis*, 63–86. Amsterdam, 1995.
Kristeller, P. O. "Proclus as a reader of Plato and Plotinus, and His Influence in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance." In *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4:115–137. Rome, 1996.
Labrousse, E. "Adresse du colloque." In Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. *The Emergence of Tolerance*, 1–2.

Lecler, J. *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la réforme* . Paris, 1955.
Levi, A. *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis*. New Haven, 2002.
Lindeboom, J. *Stiefkinderen van het Christendom*. The Hague, 1929.
Loosjes, J. *Geschiedenis der lutherse kerk in de Nederlanden* . The Hague, 1921.
——. *Naamlijst van predikanten, hoogleeraren en proponenten der luthersche kerk in Nederland*. The Hague, 1925.
Lyby, T., and O. P. Grell. "The Consolidation of Lutheranism in Denmark and Norway." In *The Scandinavian Reformation from Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform*, edited by O. P. Grell, 114–143. Cambridge, 1995.
Mack, P. *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic*. Leiden, 1993.
Marnef, G. *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577*, translated by J. C. Grayson. Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, ser. 114, vol. 1. Baltimore, 1996.
Matheson, P. *Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg*. Oxford, 1972.
——. "Humanism and Reform Movements." In *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*, edited by A. Goodman and A. Mckay, 23–42. London, 1990.
Mcgrath, A. E. *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* . Oxford, 1987.
——. *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* . Oxford, 1990.
——. *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, 1998.
——. *Reformation Thought*. 3rd ed. Oxford, 1999.
Millet, O. "La Réforme protestante et la rhétorique (circa 1520–1550)." In *Histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne, 1450–1950* , edited by M. Fumaroli, 259–312. Paris, 1999.
Moeller, B. "Disputations." In *OER* 2:487–490.
——. "Zwinglis Disputationen." *Zeitschrift der Savigny Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 87 (1970): 275–324; 91 (1974): 213–364.
——. "Zu den städtischen Disputationen der frühen Reformation." In *Festschrift für Martin Heckel zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, edited by K.-H. Kästner and K. W. Nörr, 179–195. Tübingen, 1999.
Mout, M. E. H. N. "Het intellectuele milieu van Willem van Oranje." *BMGN* 99 (1984): 596–625.
——. "Staat und Calvinismus in der Republik der Vereinigten Niederlande." In *Territorialstaat und Calvinismus*, edited by M. Schaab, 87–96. Stuttgart, 1993.
——. "Humanists and the Horrors of War: Neostoicism and the Revolt of the Netherlands." In *España y Holanda: Handelingen van de Nederlands-Spaanse Historische Colloquia 1984–1988*, edited by H. De Schepper and P. J. A. N. Rietbergen, 109–118. Madrid and Nijmegen, 1993.
——. "Spiritualisten in de Nederlandse Reformatie van de zestiende eeuw." *BMGN* 111 (1996): 297–313.
——. "Erasmianism in Modern Dutch Historiography." In *Erasmianism: Idea and Reality*, edited by M. E. H. N. Mout, H. Smolinsky and J. Trapman, 189–198. Knaw Verhandelingen, afd. Letterkunde, n. s. 174. Amsterdam, 1997.
——. "Limits and Debates: a Comparative View of Dutch Toleration in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century." In Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. *The Emergence of Tolerance*, 37–47.
——. "Erasmianischer Humanismus und reformierter Protestantismus zur Zeit a Lascos." In *Johannes a Lasco (1499–1560): Polnischer baron, Humanist und europäischer Reformator; Beiträge zum internationalen Symposium vom 14.–17. Oktober 1999 in der Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden* , edited by C. Strohm, 21–34. Tübingen, 1999.

Müller, G., ed. *Die Religionsgespräche der Reformationszeit* . Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 19. Gütersloh, 1980.
Muller, R. A. and J. L. Thompson, eds. *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of his Sixtieth Birthday*. Grand Rapids, 1996.
——. *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. Oxford, 2000.
Nijenhuis, W. "Coornhert en de Heidelbergse Catechismus. Moment in de strijd tussen humanisme en Reformatie." *NTT* 18 (1963): 271–288.
——. "Variations within Dutch Calvinism in the Sixteenth Century." In *Ecclesia reformata* 2:163–182. Leiden, 1972.
——. *Adrianus Saravia (c.1532–1613): Dutch Calvinist, First Reformed Defender of the English Episcopal Church Order on the Basis of the Ius Divinum* . Studies in the History of Christian Thought 21. Leiden, 1980.
——. "Een monoloog van Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert." *NAKG* 60 (1980): 90–106.
Oberman, H. A. *Werden und Wertung der Reformation* . Tübingen, 1977.
——. "The Travail of Tolerance: Containing Chaos in Early Modern Europe." In Grell and Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance*, 13–31.
Ocker, C. *Biblical Poetics before Humanism and Reformation* . Cambridge, 2002.
Otterspeer, W. *Groepsportret met dame*, vol. 1, *Het bolwerk van de vrijheid: De Leidse universiteit, 1575–1672.* Amsterdam, 2000.
Parker, G. *The Dutch Revolt*. Revised ed. Harmondsworth, 1977.
Pelikan, J. *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine*. London, 1971.
Pettegree, A. *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism*. Oxford, 1992.
——. "Coming to Terms with Victory: The Upbuilding of a Calvinist Church in Holland, 1572–1590." In *Calvinism in Europe, 1540–1620* , edited by A. Pettegree, A. Duke and G. Lewis, 160–180. Cambridge, 1994.
——. "The Politics of Toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572–1620." In Grell and Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance*, 182–198.
——. *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* . Oxford, 2002.
——. "A provincial news community in sixteenth-century Europe." In *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands. Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke.* Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions. History, Culture, Religion, Ideas CXXI, edited by Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer, 33–48. Leiden, 2007.
Pfnür, V. "Die Einigung bei den Religionsgesprächen von Worms und Regensburg 1540/ 41 eine Täuschung?" In Müller, *Die Religionsgespräche*, 55–88.
Pollmann, J. *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641).* Manchester, 1999.
——. "Off the Record: Problems in the Quantification of Calvinist Church Discipline." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33 (2002): 423–438.
——. "The Low Countries." In: Ryrie (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in the European Reformations*, edited by A. Ryrie, 80–101. Basingstoke, 2006.
Pont, J. W. *Geschiedenis van het lutheranisme in de Nederlanden tot 1618* . Haarlem, 1911.
Popkin, R. H. *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* . Revised ed. Berkeley CA, 1979.
——. "Theories of Knowledge." In *CHRP*, 668–684.
Posthumus Meyjes, G. H. M. "Protestant Irenicism in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." in *The End of Strife*, edited by D. Loades, 77–93. Edinburgh, 1984.
——. "Tolérance et irénisme." In Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. *The Emergence of Tolerance*, 63–73.

Reardon, B. M. G. *Religious Thought in the Reformation*. 2nd ed. Harlow, 1995.
Rogier, L. J. *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw*. 3rd ed. Amsterdam, 1964.
Sap, J. W. "Voor de vrije Nederlanden en de eer van God: Politieke tolerantie in de zestiende eeuw." In *De lege tolerantie: Over vrijheid en vrijblijvendheid in Nederland*, edited by M. Ten Hooven, 39–58. Amsterdam, 2001.
Scheib, O. *Die Reformationsdiskussionen in der Hansestadt Hamburg, 1522–1528: Zur Struktur und Problematik der Religionsgespräche* . Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte 112. Münster, 1976.
Schilling, H. "Confessional Europe." In Brady et al. *Handbook of European History* , 2:641–681.
Schöffer, I. "Coornhert (1522–1590)." in Bonger, *Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert: Dwars maar recht*, 9–17.
Schutte, G. J. "Het calvinistisch Nederland." In *Het calvinistisch Nederland: Mythe en werkelijkheid*, 9–26. Hilversum, 2000.
Spaans, J. *Haarlem na de Reformatie: Stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven, 1577–1620* . The Hague, 1989.
Speelman, H. A. *Calvijn en de zelfstandigheid van de kerk* . Kampen, 1994.
Spies, M. "Rhetorica: strategie," in M. Spies and K. Meerhoff, *Rhetorica: strategie en creativiteit*, 5–21. Amsterdam, 1993.
——. "Rhetoric and Civic Harmony in the Dutch Republic of the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century." In *Rhetorica movet: Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honour of Heinrich F. Plett*, edited by P. L. Oesterreich and T. O. Sloane, 57–72. Leiden, 1999.
Stump, E. and P. V. Spade. "Obligations." in *CHLMP*, 315–341.
Swart, K. W. *Willem van Oranje en de Nederlandse Opstand 1572–1584*, edited by R. P. Fagel, M. E. H. N. Mout and H. F. K. Van Nierop. The Hague, 1994.
Ten Boom, H. *De Reformatie in Rotterdam*. Hollandse Historische Reeks 7. Amsterdam and The Hague, 1987.
Ter Braak, M. "Veroverend vertalen: Wat de verdraagzame humanist veroveren wilde." Book review in the newspaper *Het Vaderland*, 5 November 1939.
Thoenes, P. "Holland, humanisme en burgercultuur." In *Geschiedenis van het humanisme: Hoofdfiguren uit de humanistische traditie*, edited by P. B. Cliteur and W. Van Dooren, 267–288. Amsterdam, 1991.
Tracy, J. D. "Erasmus, Coornhert and the Acceptance of Religious Disunity in the Body Politic: a Low Countries Tradition?" In Berkvens-Stevelinck, et al. *The Emergence of Tolerance*, 49–62.
Trapman, J. "Le rôle des 'sacramentaires' des origines de la Réforme jusqu'en 1530 aux Pays-Bas." *NAKG* 63 (1983): 1–24.
Turchetti, M. " 'Concorde ou tolérance?' de 1562 à 1598," *Revue historique* 274 (1985): 341–355.
——. "Une question mal posée: Erasme et la tolérance. L'idée de sygkatabasis." *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 53 (1991): 379–395.
——. "Religious Concord and Political Tolerance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century France." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991): 15–25.
Unger, J. H. W. "De resolutiën van de Staten van Holland van 1577 en 1578." *BMHG* 14 (1893): 1–68.
Valkema Blouw, P. "A Haarlem Press in Sedan and Emden (1561–1569). Part 1: Haarlem." *Quaerendo* 19 (1989): 225–250.
——. *Typographia Batava, 1541–1600: Repertorium van boeken gedrukt in Nederland tussen 1541 en 1600*, edited by A. C. Schuytvlot. Nieuwkoop, 1998.
Van Alfen, H. J. P. "Dagregister van 's Prinsen levensloop." In *Prins Willem van Oranje, 1533–1933*, 409–452. Haarlem, 1933.

Van Asselt, W. J. "Protestant Scholasticism: Some Methodological Considerations in the Study of its Development." *NAKG* 81 (2001): 265–274.

Van Der Lem, G. A. C. "De Prins in de geschiedschrijving van de laatste halve eeuw." In *Willem van Oranje in de historie, 1584–1984: Vier eeuwen beeldvorming en geschiedschrijving*, edited by E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier and A. E. M. Janssen, 191–219. Utrecht, 1984.

——. *De Opstand in de Nederlanden (1555–1609)* . Utrecht, 1995.

Van Der Plaat, G. "Willem van Oranje in beeld: van "gezondene Gods om de tyrannye tegen te staen" tot machiavellist zonder religieuze overtuiging." In Uit diverse bronnen gelicht: opstellen aangeboden aan Hans Smit ter gelegenheid van zijn vijfenzestigste verjaardag, edited by E. C. Dijkhof and M. J. Van Gent, 253–264. Den Haag 2007.

Van Deursen, A. T. *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen: Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarneveldt.* 3rd ed. Franeker, 1998.

——. "The Dutch Republic, 1588–1780." In *History of the Low Countries*, edited by J. C. H. Blom and E. Lamberts, translated by J. C. Kennedy, 143–177. New York and Oxford, 1999.

——. *De last van veel geluk. De geschiedenis van Nederland 1555–1702.* Amsterdam, 2004.

Van Eijnatten, J. and F. Van Lieburg. Introduction to W. Frijhoff. *Embodied Belief: Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History*, 11–16. Studies in Dutch Religious History 1. Hilversum, 2002.

——. "Van godsdienstvrijheid naar mensenrecht: Meningsvorming over censuur en persvrijheid in de Republiek, 1579–1795." *BMGN* 118 (2003): 1–21.

Van Gelder, H. A. E. *Vrijheid en onvrijheid in de Republiek: Geschiedenis der vrijheid van drukpers en godsdienst van 1572 tot 1789* . Haarlem, 1947.

——. *Getemperde vrijheid: Een verhandeling over de verhouding van kerk en staat in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en de vrijheid van meningsuiting in zake godsdienst, drukpers en onderwijs gedurende de 17e eeuw* . Groningen, 1972.

Van Gelderen, M. *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt, 1555–1590*. Cambridge, 1992.

——. "De Nederlandse Opstand (1555–1610): Van 'vrijheden' naar 'oude vrijheid' en de 'vrijheid der conscientien'." In Haitsma Mulier, *Vrijheid*, 27–52.

Van Nierop, H. F. K. "Censorship, Illicit Printing and the Revolt of the Netherlands." In *Too Mighty to be Free: Censorship and the Press in Britain and the Netherlands* , edited by A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse, 29–44. Britain and the Netherlands 9. Zutphen, 1987.

——. "Coornherts huwelijk: een bijdrage tot zijn biografie." *BMGN* 106 (1991): 33–44.

——. *Het verraad van het Noorderkwartier: Oorlog, terreur en recht in de Nederlandse Opstand*. Amsterdam, 1999.

Van Otegem, M.. "Tijd, snelheid, afstand: de mechanica van het pamflet." *De zeventiende eeuw* 17 (2001): 50–61.

Van Sas, N. C. F., ed. *Vaderland: Een geschiedenis vanaf de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940*. Reeks Nederlandse begripsgeschiedenis 1. Amsterdam, 1999.

Van 'T Spijker, W., ed. "Acta Synode van Dordrecht 1578." In *De nationale synode van Dordrecht 1578*, edited by D. Nauta and J. P. Van Dooren, 142–184. Amsterdam, 1978.

——. "Acta van de synode van Middelburg (1581)." In *De nationale synode te Middelburg in 1581: Calvinisme in opbouw in de noordelijke en zuidelijke Nederlanden*, edited by J. P. Van Dooren, 64–126. Middelburg, 1981.

Van Veen, M. "'In allen gants suyver, ende ghenoechsaem': Dirk Volckertsz. Coornhert (1522–1590) en de bijbel." *NTT* 54 (2000): 310–325.

——. *"Verschooninghe van de roomsche afgoderye": De polemiek van Calvijn met nicodemieten, in het bijzonder met Coornhert* . Bibliotheca humanistica & reformatorica 60. 't Goy-Houten, 2001.
——. "Spiritualism in The Netherlands: From David Joris to Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert." In: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33 (2002): 129–150.
——. "'No one born of God commits sin': Coornhert's perfectionism." In: *NAKG* 84 (2004): 338–357.
Veldman, I. M. *Maarten van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism in the Sixteenth Century*. Maarssen, 1977.
——. *De wereld tussen goed en kwaad: De late prenten van Coornhert* . The Hague, 1990.
——, ed. *Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert* . The Illustrated Bartsch 55. New York, 1991.
Velema, W. R. E. "Het Nederlandse vrijheidsbegrip. Ter inleiding." In *Vrijheid: Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende tot de twintigste eeuw*, edited by E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier, 1–10. Reeks Nederlandse begripsgeschiedenis 2. Amsterdam, 1999.
Verhas, C. *De beginjaren van de Hoge Raad van Holland, Zeeland en West-Friesland* . The Hague, 1997.
——. "Rechtspraak in hoogste instantie in de Nederlanden. 'De Hoge Raad van Holland, Zeeland en West-Friesland'." In *Handelingen van het tweede Hof van Holland symposium gehouden op 14 november 1997 in de Trêveszaal te Den Haag* , edited by R. Huijbrecht, 13–19. The Hague, 1998.
Vickers, B. *In Defence of Rhetoric* . Oxford, 1988.
Voogt, G. *Constraint on Trial: Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert and Religious Freedom* . Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 52. Kirksville, 2000.
Wanegffelen, T. *Ni Rome ni Genève: Des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVI^e^ siècle*. Paris, 1997.
Wansink, H. *Politieke wetenschappen aan de Leidse Universiteit 1575–±1650* . Utrecht, 1981.
Weekhout, I. *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden: De vrijheid van de drukpers in de zeventiende eeuw* . The Hague, 1998.
Wendel, F. *Calvin: Sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse* . Paris, 1950.
White, G. *Luther as a Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of their Medieval Background* . Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 30. Helsinki, 1994.
Woltjer, J. J. *De Leidse universiteit in verleden en heden* . Leiden, 1965.
——. "Het Noorden en de Pacificatie van Gent." In *Opstand en pacificatie in de Lage Landen: Bijdrage tot de studie van de Pacificatie van Gent*, 79–98. Ghent, 1976.
——."De politieke betekenis van de synode van Emden." In *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog*, 89–120. Amsterdam, 1994.
——. "De vredemakers." In *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog: Over de Nederlandse Opstand, 1555–1580*, 64–88. Amsterdam, 1994.
——, and M. E. H. N. Mout. "Settlements: The Netherlands." In Brady et al. *Handbook of European History*, vol. 2:385–415.
Wouters, A. P. F., and P. H. A. M. Abels. *Nieuw en ongezien: Kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland 1572–1621*. 2 vols. Delft, 1994.
Zijlstra, S. *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden: Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden, 1531–1675*. Hilversum, 2000.

INDEX OF NAMES

Agricola, Rudolf, 65
Albada, Aggaeus van, 48
Augustine, Saint, 9

Banchem, Johan van, 217
Beza, Theodore, 24, 69, 77, 89, 99, 102, 112, 120, 129, 131, 132, 134, 137, 144, 146, 147, 151, 152, 153, 185, 289
Bor, Pieter Cornelisz, 6, 45, 164, 192, 231
Brandt, Geeraert, 6, 45
Brederode, Artus van, 259

Calvin, Johannes, 14, 24, 38, 65, 77, 80, 89, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 112, 120, 129, 131, 132, 134, 136, 137, 144, 146, 147, 151, 152, 153, 184, 185, 223, 250, 289
Casembrood, Leonard, 124, 125
Castellio, Sebastian, 25, 48, 52, 53, 159, 161
Charles V, king of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, 62
Coninck, Cornelis de, 79
Contarini, Gasparo, 68
Coolhaes, Caspar, 29, 31, 33, 116, 157, 167
Coornhert, Dirck Volckertszoon, *passim*
Coornhert, Frans, 261, 262, 265, 266, 274
Cornelisz, Arent, 1, 5, 13, 16, 17, 21, 22, 30, 31, 64, 77–121, 125–154, 155–214, 219, 274–280, 284, 288, 289
Cornelisz, Theunis, 124
Corput, Hendrik van der, 13, 22, 31, 153, 189, 190, 194, 201, 291
Cyprian, Saint, 98

Damius, Johannes, 166, 187
Danaeus, Lambertus, 13, 18, 27, 28, 167, 170, 171, 175, 191, 192
Donteclock, Reginaldus, 1, 5, 17, 19, 21, 28, 77, 95, 96, 109–121, 126–154, 160, 163, 167–169, 188–201, 219, 275–280, 284, 288
Duifhuis, Hubert, 29, 170
Duplessis-Mornay, Philippe, 180, 181

Egmond van der Nieuburgh, Dirck, 17, 261, 262
Erasmus, Desiderius, 37, 54, 59

Foreest, Nanning van, 218
Franck, Sebastian, 19, 51, 54
Frederick II, king of Denmark, 281, 282
Frederick III (the Wise), Palatine Elector, 69, 209
Feugueray, Guillaume de, 77, 125, 146

Groot, Cornelis de, 17

Heemskerck, Maarten van, 17
Helmichius, Werner, 4
Herberts, Herman, 29, 178, 179, 290
Hogendorp, Gijsbert, 217, 218
Holmannus, Johannes, 191, 192
Hooft, Pieter Cornelisz, 6
Hoogeveen, Gerard van, 124, 125
Hortensius, Hieronymus, 157–163, 182, 287, 290

Juan de Austria, Don, 20, 114

Kuchlinus, Johannes, 2

Laan, Nicolaas van der, 6, 16, 41, 89, 163–166, 187–190, 193, 199, 232
Losen, Sebastiaan van, 218

Marck, Willem van der, Lord of Lumey, 87
Marnix of Sint Aldegonde, Philip, 16, 80–84
Melanchthon, 105
Menijn, Joost de, 218, 219
Mierlo, Godfried van, 80–82
Mijle, Adriaan van der, 16, 79, 80, 84, 85

Orange, William, Prince of, 3, 5, 16, 18, 21, 32, 46, 54, 75, 78, 81, 85, 88, 93, 96, 124, 125, 136, 157, 211–213, 216, 217, 223, 267, 276, 281, 282
Ortelius, Abraham, 17

Parma, Alexander Farnese, Prince of, 21, 156, 276, 278, 285
Pelagius, 161
Philip II, king of Spain, 3, 20, 87, 124

Rennenberg, George Lalaing, Count of, 24, 285

Saliger, Johannes, 83, 85
Saravia, Adrianus, 1, 5, 10, 11, 16, 17, 30, 31, 39, 45, 155–163, 179, 196–201, 211, 219–280, 284, 288–290
Servetus, Michael, 24, 25
Spiegel, Hendrik Laurensz, 17
Stakenbroek, Roelof van, 83
Sturmius, Hubertus, 191
Stuver, Gerrit, 89
Symonsdochter, Cornelia, 19, 220, 225

Taffin, Jean, 77, 80, 84, 85
Thomaszoon, Thomas, 166
Tilius, Thomas, 2, 7, 13, 16, 17, 30, 31, 75–86, 88, 91–96, 102, 108, 109, 112, 117–120, 129–131, 145, 149, 155, 185, 284

Vermigli, Peter Martyr, 69, 102

Wyngaerden, Gerard van, 217

Zuren, Jan van, 89, 222
Zwingli, Huldrych, 67, 100, 105, 107, 108, 185, 223